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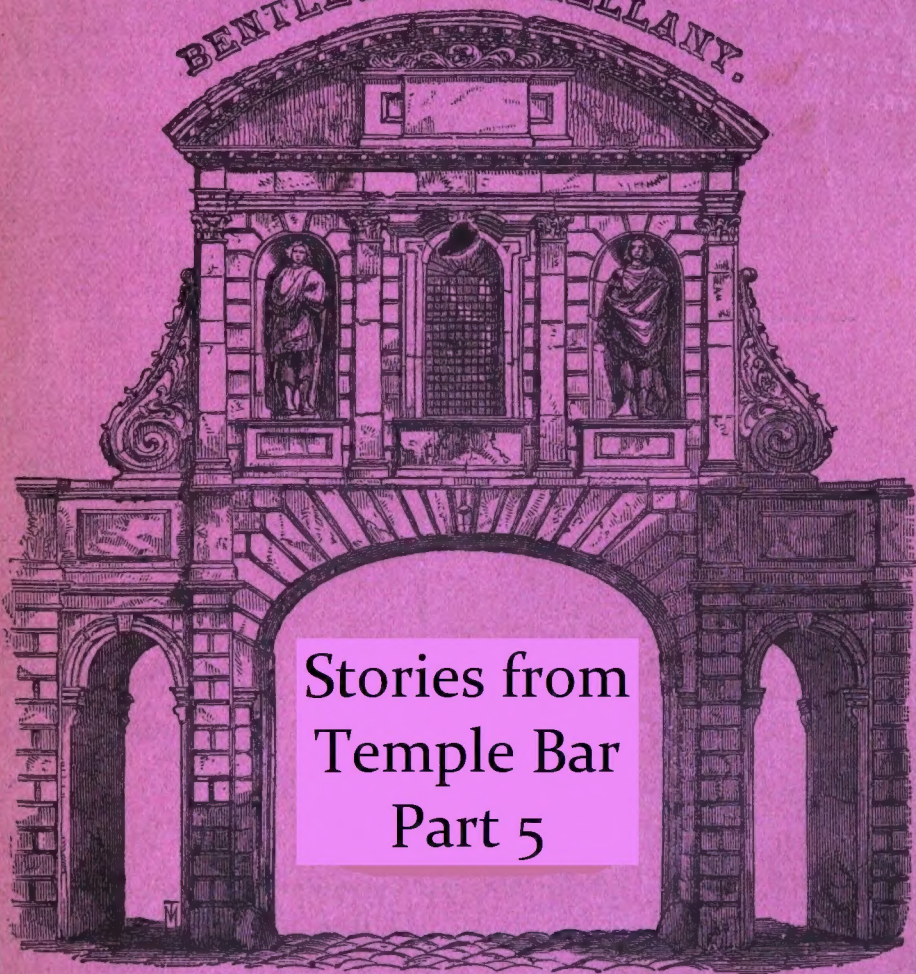
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# TEMPLE BAR

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED

BENTLEY'S MISCELLANY.



Stories from  
Temple Bar  
Part 5

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## **Stories from Temple Bar, Part 5 (1885-1893)**

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## The Chess-player.

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### CHAPTER I.

THOSE whose interest in records of the supernatural is based chiefly, or entirely, upon what is monstrous or horrible, will find little pleasure in the perusal of the following narrative;—a narrative of events most wild, truly, and most strange, yet in themselves most simple. Regarding the *facts* of which I speak, to their truth I can bear witness. That they have filled me with amazement, with perplexity, even with dread, I freely own; but their reality I cannot deny, unless I refuse the evidence of my own senses. As to explanation, that is another matter. On that point I prefer to remain silent, and to content myself with a plain narration, since I confess I am not able to advance any conjecture which a sound judgment could approve, or which would not lay me open to a charge of superstition.

It was towards the close of a dark, heavy, and sombre autumn day that I, together with the messenger who had summoned me, arrived in sight of the house in which my services as a physician were required. It stood on the further shore of a black and silent lake, round which the solitary glades and mountain passes extended for many miles without other sign of human habitation. The spot was, indeed, in the last degree wild and lonely; nor did the aspect of the ancient mansion, black with age against the edge of the black water, do much to relieve the melancholy impressiveness of the scene.

The only way of approach to the mansion lay across the lake. My guide unfastened the chain of a small boat which slept among the sedges at our feet, and having taken my seat in the prow, we pushed off into the dark water. The shore receded, and the two great hills from which we had descended. Before us lay the mansion, backed by still loftier mountains, the peaks of which rose far into the sky. As we approached the building I regarded its details with growing curiosity; the strangeness of its situation, locked, as it were, in a recess of rock—the moss-grown castellated walls—the ancient tower—the narrow slit-like windows—the flight of steps descending to the water. What strange inhabitant was this, I wondered, who preferred this aged tenement, in its solitude, its wildness, and its glamour, to the luxuriant surround-

ings of a modern dwelling? Who could support, day after day, and season after season, the lifeless lustre of that inky lake, the unchangeable oppression of those overwatching hills? Certainly, no common person.

"Certainly, no common person." As I repeated these words to myself the boat touched the fungus-tinted granite of the steps ascending to the archway of the door. Another servant appeared at the entrance, who, taking my bag and wrapper, preceded me into a dusky hall, where the light which entered through the deep-set pointed windows was barely sufficient to reveal the rich oaken carving of the walls and ceiling, the ancient and faded tapestries which veiled the doorways, and the spectral gleaming of suspended arms. Nothing here seemed to have been disturbed for ages. Not a sign of modern life was visible. The dust of centuries blackened the rafters. The scent of antiquity was in the air.

Thence I was conducted through many narrow, shadowy, and winding corridors to a small chamber at the other end of the building. This room was furnished in a more recent style, and indeed, except for the scarcity of light occasioned by the same pointed and narrow windows which I had before observed, might have been called a comfortable apartment. The floor and ceiling were, indeed, of the same black oak as before; an antique lamp hung from the roof by a long chain; the door was screened by a curtain of tarnished tapestry: so much was ancient, mediæval. But the walls were surrounded with shelves and stored with books, papers and writing materials lay on the table, and an easy-chair stood invitingly beside a cheerful fire. The room was empty.

"My master will be with you immediately, sir," said the servant. With this announcement he retired, and I was left alone.

As I now stood before the fire, it struck me for the first time as a little remarkable that I did not even know my patient's name. I had been summoned on this errand by mere chance, my door-plate having happened to have been the first to catch the eye of the messenger. I was a new arrival in the neighbourhood and knew little of the residents. Of this remote and singular dwelling I had never so much as heard. I looked round the room. Immediately my attention became arrested and my interest awakened. Whatever sort of person might turn out to be the owner of this strange place, it was evident that he had one passion in common with myself. On the table stood a *chess-board*, with a game half played. Beside the board lay a note-book, in which seemed to be pencilled remarks on the position. I approached the bookshelves. One whole shelf—some dozens of volumes—



contained solely works referring to the game, from the largest German *Handbuch* to the thinnest pamphlet; transactions of chess societies in all parts of the world; bulky scrap-books filled with cuttings of problems, games, and annotations. Several of the volumes were of the rarest kind, such as I had never hoped to set my eyes on. And I too was a *virtuoso*, and a poor one! Is it any wonder that for some minutes at least I envied the fortunate possessor of these treasures, with all my heart?

I had, however, little time to moralise upon this villainy of fortune. My reflections were cut short by the opening of the door. I turned, and found myself face to face with the object of my envy.

For a moment we looked at each other in silence, and with mutual surprise. I saw before me a man somewhat past the prime of life, with a face which could not but be called beautiful even in its extreme fragility and pallor. I have said that he appeared to be somewhat past the prime of life; but his true age would have been difficult to determine. One who had looked only at his face, and at his strangely bright, yet tintless eyes, would have pronounced him young; yet his hair was the hair of a very old man, being as white as snow or ashes.

The surprise with which I regarded him, however, arose not from his appearance, but from a strange discovery which I made as my eyes fell on his person. Long though it was since I had seen them last, these peculiarities of face and figure were perfectly familiar to me. It was impossible that I could be mistaken.

"Philip—Philip Froissart!" I ejaculated at last, recovering a little from my astonishment.

"What," he answered on his side, "Paul Seldon!" And thereupon we clasped hands with all the cordiality of an old regard.

Strange and unexpected meeting! Five-and-twenty years—the quarter of a century—had passed since I and Philip Froissart had met. As undergraduates of the same college, we had once been close and intimate friends; and I had known as much of Froissart as it was possible to know of a person of his peculiar nature. But from the time of our leaving the University, our ways of life had drawn us far apart; me to walk a London hospital, Froissart to wander in luxurious idleness to all parts of the civilized world. The circumstances of our life had been wholly different. Each had been carried away by separate billows of the Great Ocean; and thus it happened, as it often does happen in such cases, that though our friendship had never been broken, nor weakened, nor forgotten, we had passed out of each

other's sight "like ships upon the sea." And now our paths had crossed again—how strangely! Yet my surprise was not so great as it might have been had I not been well acquainted with the character of my friend. I knew that neither his tastes nor his actions nor his motives were those of other men. I knew the *mysteriousness* (I can find no better term) which shadowed his character from the common eye. I knew well his passion for the singular, the strange, and the fantastic. I remembered his reserve, his love of solitude. The strangely interesting place in which I found him, seemed, indeed, the fitting habitation of such a man. An ancient saying, picked up I know not where, preserved in I know not what "untrodden region of my mind," passed through my brain, "As the eagle inherits the mountain summits, the owl the hollow yew-tree, the eremite the hill-cave, and the corpse the tomb,"—so seemed this old, this time-dimmed mansion, so remote, so strange, so melancholy, so forgotten, the fitting and congenial home of Philip Froissart.

We sat down; and for some moments regarded each other in silence. Although I had not failed to recognise him at first sight, on thus observing him with attention I found that years had not passed without leaving their mark on Froissart. The alteration was not so perceptible in his face or figure as in his voice and manner, which from having formerly been remarkable for their weighty calmness and self-possession now seemed nervous, restless, and agitated.

The appearance of illness—perhaps I should rather say, of disquietude and agitation—in his face recalled to me the purpose for which I had been summoned. I inquired whether it was on his own account that he had sent for medical advice. He replied in the affirmative. What then were his symptoms? What did he suspect?

Froissart answered me with clearness and precision. I gathered from his replies that he was suffering from disorder of the nervous system, accompanied by prolonged insomnia. He had, moreover, lately had suspicion, from certain sensations in that organ, that his heart was affected. "I am not naturally a nervous subject," he added with a melancholy smile, "but at present I am no better than an old woman, Paul. I fear you will find me quite a ruin, perhaps beyond the capacity of your art to restore."

I sent without delay for my bag, produced a stethoscope, and examined him carefully. I could find nothing wrong; on the contrary, all the important organs of the body were in sound condition. The nervousness, together with the resulting insomnia, of which he spoke, proceeded therefore from some outer



cause, which it now became my business to discover. The supposed affection of the heart was merely imaginary.

"Froissart," I said, when I had finished, "I can only account for your state by supposing you to be subject to some secret cause of agitation of which you have not spoken. If such be the case you must not hide it, or I can do nothing for you."

As I said these words Froissart started and regarded me with agitation—but he was silent. The action was not lost on me. I did not think fit to increase his disturbance by pressing the question further; but I paused a moment, so as to give him space to answer, if he pleased. He understood my silence.

"It is just," he said at length, "it is very just. I will not hide it. I have—I *have* a most strange story to tell you, Paul. And it is because it is so strange, so unaccountable, so incredible, that I hesitate to tell it, lest you think me mad or dreaming."

He paused; the tone was peculiar; I waited with much curiosity for him to continue. But my curiosity was doomed, for the time, to disappointment.

"But not now," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "not now. This is neither the time nor the place; and I am ashamed to have kept you here talking about my ailments when you must be dying of hunger. It is true that if I lived like a hermit in a rock I could hardly be more solitary than I am; but my fare is somewhat better than an anchorite's, as I hope to show you. Come."

Curbing the curiosity which his words, and no less his manner, had excited in me—(perhaps the more easily owing to the fact that I was really beginning to feel a little hungry)—I followed Froissart into a neighbouring apartment, where a table was already spread for two persons. This room, like the hall into which I had first been ushered, was of dark and ancient aspect. The silver on the table bore the same impression of antiquity—it was massive, richly wrought, and stamped with a device of armorial arms. Froissart had not exaggerated when he likened himself in solitude to a hermit. His establishment, it appeared, consisted of himself alone, together with the few domestics necessary for his requirements. Notwithstanding this, the dinner to which we sat down was excellent; the wine was choice; and I secretly applauded Froissart's good sense and taste. I am no *bon vivant*; yet I confess I have much sympathy with the dictum of the great humourist, "I shrink instinctively from one who professes to like minced veal." I noticed, however, that Froissart himself ate little, though he drank with less moderation;—a sign from which I boded ill. I need not say that I

observed him with attention—at least I need not say so to one of my own profession. No lynx, no eagle, has, nor needs to have, such eyes as a physician. And I was a physician watching a friend.

As we dined, our conversation, as might have been expected, turned upon the events which had filled the lives of each of us during the twenty years and more which had elapsed since we had parted. Froissart's life, as he related it, had however been a singularly uneventful one, while, at the same time, it had been essentially characteristic of the man. Many years before, he told me, he had fallen in with the owner of that house, and had accepted an invitation to pass a few days in his company. A strong community of tastes drew together host and guest; days flew by, and still Froissart lingered; days passed into weeks, weeks into months, months into years, and still he and old Martin Sombras—a bachelor like himself—lived together in the solitary mansion. The life suited them both, and, what is more singular, they suited each other. Their days were occupied in scientific investigations, in which both took much interest. Their evenings passed—in *playing chess*, which game was in Sombras an engrossing passion.

I could not conceive why Froissart, as he mentioned this very simple and natural fact (for I well knew his old skill and love of the game), should exhibit a return of that same nervous agitation which I had observed in him before. It was but for a moment, it is true; and yet I was sure that I was not mistaken. It was strange.

In this way, Froissart continued, they had lived together uninterruptedly till three months ago, when old Martin Sombras suddenly died, leaving the house and the whole of his property, which was considerable, to his companion of so many years. Since that time Froissart had lived absolutely alone, nor had he even crossed the lake since the day on which he had seen his old friend carried to the grave—"That lake," he so expressed himself, "over which all worldly rumour flies as slowly, and perishes as surely, as birds that wandered of old over the waters of Aornis."

As Froissart spoke, a picture arose in my mind's eye. I saw again the gloomy water, as it was when I had crossed it in the afternoon—black, impenetrable, stilled as night and death. The fancy struck me at the moment to ask Froissart the cause of the remarkable appearance of the water—so lustrous, yet so sombre.

"I suppose," I said, "the lake is unusually deep?"

"Deep?" he repeated. "You are right; it is so. *How* deep I am unable to tell you. There is an old saying in the neighbour-



hood that it reaches to the centre of the earth ; and the legend, however absurd, shows that the extreme depth of the water has been long known. It is, I believe, an undoubted fact that the lake has never been fathomed."

Froissart rose from the table as he spoke, and led the way back to the library, where our coffee was brought to us by a manservant. Evening had now closed in, and the burning fire and the lighted lamp made the room look warm and comfortable. And yet I felt, without precisely knowing why, a curious uneasiness. Perhaps, scarcely recognised by myself, the recollection of the mystery of which Froissart had obscurely spoken, continued to haunt the inmost recesses of my mind. Froissart, however, made no further allusion to the subject, and I forbore to press him for an explanation, which might not perhaps be agreeable to his humour. He should choose his own time. We had arranged that I should stay with him for a day or two at least—perhaps longer ; so that there was no occasion for haste.

It so happened, however, that this very evening was not to pass by without a beginning of those strange events which it has so singularly fallen to my lot to chronicle.

For something unusual, even startling, I was of course to some extent forewarned by the sentences which Froissart had let fall. For what actually occurred, however, it is impossible that any mortal could have been prepared.

I have said that, in spite of the warmth and comfort of the surroundings, I was conscious of a sensation of uneasiness. It was perhaps—or certainly—the steady growth of this sensation over me which at length prompted me to speak of it aloud.

"Froissart," I said suddenly, after a long interval of silence, during which we had both become engrossed in our own thoughts, "there is something about this old house of yours which makes me shiver. What is it? Have you not felt it? It is something ghostly, I am sure."

I said these words of course merely in jest ; but Froissart started, as if my voice had roused him from a reverie. His strange agitation returned ; he grew paler than before, gazed at me with a most singular expression, and seemed about to speak—but, as before, after a moment's hesitation, he remained silent. At the same time he glanced at the ancient timepiece which stood over the fireplace, as if suddenly reminded of something he had forgotten.

"Paul," he said, hurriedly, "I must leave you for a short time. I shall probably be back in a few minutes ; but if I am detained you will not mind amusing yourself with a book, I know. I am

exceedingly sorry to leave you even for a minute, but you will excuse me, I am sure." And murmuring apologies for leaving me alone, he hurried out of the room.

I was so much surprised at the strangeness and excitement of his manner that for a moment I did nothing. Then I sprang from my seat, and followed him. A sudden impulse resolved me to urge him to grant at once the confidence he had promised me, and not to endanger his health further with agitations which he was evidently in no condition to bear. My intervention of course might not be necessary; so much the better if it were not. But I chose to be on the safe side.

When I gained the door, Froissart was already at the end of the corridor; in a moment more I lost sight of him. When I reached the spot where he had been, he was no longer to be seen. There were, however, two ways only which he could have taken. On the right was another gallery which opened out of the one in which I stood; on the left was a dark and narrow flight of stairs which appeared to lead upwards into the tower. Had he taken the gallery he would, I thought, still have been visible—for he would hardly have been able to reach the end of it in so short a time. He must then have taken the stairs.

I stopped, and listened. The flight, as I have said, was dark, and I could see nothing; but listening, I thought I heard a sound above as of the unlocking of a door. This decided me. I turned towards the stairs.

I ascended slowly and, with caution, for the steps were cramped and winding. Once or twice I stopped and listened; but I could now hear nothing. After what seemed to me an interminable ascent, the stairs came out upon a broad landing on which two or three doors opened. From one of these, at the opposite end of the landing to which I stood, a light shone; and now I could see that Froissart was there, and in the act of striking a light and kindling a lamp. I was about to advance, when the lamp flamed up, and the interior of the room became visible. It was of small dimensions, and seemed to be fitted up as a workshop. I saw a lathe, a bench, a small forge, a confusion of wood and iron materials, and a quantity of tools. But I did not see these only.

To my extreme surprise, Froissart was not alone. The room was already tenanted.

In the middle of the chamber was a small, low, square table, the top of which was fitted with a chess-board. The pieces, of red and white ivory, were drawn up as at the commencement of a game. At this table a man was already sitting, with his side face



turned towards me, and his eyes apparently fixed upon the board. His aspect was singular, not to say startling,—it was that of a foreigner—of an Oriental. His dress consisted of a coiled turban, a long, loose flowing robe, hanging sleeves, a crimson scarf, and a jewelled collar. His complexion appeared to be swarthy; he wore a long grey beard; and he sat before the table in a thoughtful attitude, his elbow resting on the arm of his chair.

I have said that I was surprised—startled; so much it was natural that I should be. The unusual dress and nationality of the figure, especially strange in that place, was sufficient to account for such sensations. Yet neither word describes with exactness the nature of my feelings. My heart trembled in its seat; my blood was troubled in its current. It was as if the uneasy feeling I had previously experienced had suddenly become intensified a hundredfold as my eyes rested on the chequered table, and the figure which sat before it. *Are there mysterious influences, not human, which make their presence felt like witchcraft, unintelligible to men? What was near me?*

Froissart, having lighted the lamp, took his seat at the table opposite the Oriental. His behaviour surprised me much. Even from the distance at which I stood, I could see that he was labouring under strong excitement. On taking his seat, he looked tremulously towards the turbaned figure, and hastily moved a pawn. Then he remained gazing at his opponent without moving or speaking, as if in a sort of fascination.

The feeling of breathless expectancy, which seemed to possess him, extended itself to me. I waited silently, even in trepidation, for what would happen next.

Five minutes wasted—ten minutes—still Froissart sat thus, his eyes fixed intently, eagerly, upon the face before him. My surprise increased; I could not conceive why the other did not move his pawn in answer. The first moves in a game of chess are stereotyped, and require no consideration. Yet the player continued to gaze fixedly at the board, apparently absorbed in thought, and gave no sign of motion.

A hundred thoughts, surmises, perplexities, speculations, flitted through my brain, each more bewildering than the rest. How came this strange personage to be sitting here alone in the dark tower before Froissart came? What was the cause of Froissart's curious agitation? For what reason had he left me to play chess with this mysterious stranger? Wherefore did the stranger thus refuse to play? And wherefore—above all!—did *I* feel myself so chill, so shaken, as if I had beheld a resurrection from the dead?

As I was vainly endeavouring to conjecture what could be the explanation of these things, or rather, not so much conjecturing as lost in a bewildering sense of their existence, Froissart changed his attitude. He rose, drew a deep breath, and prepared to extinguish the lamp. Had I been capable of feeling further surprise, I think I should have felt it. Nothing had happened—nothing which explained the presence of the stranger, nothing which even suggested a motive for Froissart's visit to the tower—yet he was evidently coming away. As he stretched out his hand to take the lamp, I advanced towards the door. He heard my step, and, turning round and seeing who it was, he came forward at once with the lamp in his hand, shutting and locking the door behind him.

"How did you find your way up here?" he said, in a voice which he strove, not altogether successfully, to render easy and unconcerned. "Have I been long gone?"

I told him—I explained without reserve the reasons which had induced me to follow him. He understood me; he pressed my hand in silence. We descended the stairs together.

"To-morrow," he said—"to-morrow I purpose to tell you all. To-night it is late, and my story is a long one; nor do I feel at this moment either the courage or the humour. Did you see"—dropping his voice to its lowest key—"did you see——"

"I did," I answered, replying to his look; "and I will ask you but one question, Froissart—perhaps a very strange one. Is that figure yonder—is it, or is it not—*alive*?"

We had, as I have said, been descending the stairs as we spoke thus; and we had by this time reached the door of the chamber in which I was to pass the night. Froissart regarded me with a singular expression.

"I know not whether you will decide that I am mad," he said, "if I answer truthfully that question. Perhaps you would be justified in so thinking, though you would be wrong. Yet I will answer it. You asked me whether or not yonder figure is a living being; and I now tell you—*that I do not know!*"

As he returned this strange reply, his voice, his manner, thrilled me. I looked attentively at Froissart. His face was now composed, his voice steady, his eye clear and calm. I could perceive in him no trace of aberration or illusion. And yet his words were surely "wild and whirling" as those of nightmare, of frenzy, of delirium!



## CHAPTER II.

WE separated for the night; but it was long before I retired to rest; and when at last I did so, I lay awake for hours, my brain busy with conjectural explanations of what I had seen and heard. No explanation, however, presented itself to my mind which I could accept as being in the least degree satisfactory. The only solution which seemed at all possible was that which had been present to my thoughts when I put to Froissart the question which he had so strangely answered—that the figure I had seen was a machine, skilfully constructed in human shape—in other words, an automaton. And yet how to reconcile his answer with this theory?—a theory which moreover, after all, explained nothing, neither Froissart's agitation, nor the motive of his visit to the tower, nor his behaviour in the presence of the figure, nor his inexplicable answer, nor my own sensations. No; this solution would not serve. Yet I could think of no other which did not seem still wilder and more fantastic. At length I gave up in despair the attempt to find an explanation of the mystery, and, weary of vain conjectures, I fell asleep.

But now the events of the day, pursuing my vexed spirit through the veil of slumber, again rose up before it, clad in wild disguises, arrayed in changed and bewildering and phantasmagorial forms. I thought I was again in the small boat in which I had that afternoon been ferried across the lake, and was crossing, as then, the unfathomable waters towards the mansion. But now, though as before I sat in the vessel's prow, I was not alone—Froissart was by my side; and in place of the old man who had been my guide another figure occupied the stern—a figure veiled, shadowy, heart-shaking. As I gazed stupefied at this presence, suddenly it rose up, enlarged itself, towered up gigantic, and grew distinct and brilliant: and now I knew again the turbaned figure of the dark tower! For some moments it held itself motionless; then its hands were outstretched, its eyes glittered, its mouth parted, and it advanced upon us. Froissart shrank before it, cowering behind me. Still it came on, nearer, nearer; till in the terror of the moment, and unable to endure further the agitation its presence caused me, I sprang up suddenly before it. The figure recoiled, tottered, lost its balance, and fell heavily over the side of the boat into the gloomy flood, in which it instantly disappeared. At the same instant I awoke and saw Froissart himself, who had come to call me, standing beside my pillow.

It was on my lips to tell him the strange imaginations which

had possessed me ; but I refrained. I rose, and we descended to the room in which we had dined the night before, and where the morning meal awaited us. Somewhat to my surprise, and much to my disappointment, Froissart made no reference to the events of the preceding night, nor to his promise of revelation. We passed the hours of the morning in conversation on many subjects ; and I found that my curiosity was doomed to be prolonged. It was not until the afternoon, when the brief November day was already dying, that on a sudden, and with considerable abruptness, Froissart rose from the chair where he had been sitting for some time in reflection, and desired me to follow him.

I had no need to ask him whither. His voice, his face, his manner, answered me at once more clearly than words. At last the hour was come !

Froissart led the way in silence to the dark tower.

We reached the stairs—we mounted—we stood before the door. Froissart inserted the key, the door opened, and we entered.

The figure I had seen the night before was sitting before his chequered table, with the turban, beard, and flowing robe, exactly as I had seen them. On one point, however, I found that I had been mistaken ; the eyes of the figure were not fixed, as I had supposed, upon the pieces, but were gazing straight before him.

I regarded him with strangely mingled sensations of curiosity and awe. The latter feeling I could not entirely account for ; I reflected that it was probably a survival of that which I had experienced the previous evening, strengthened by a memory of that strange dream which had disturbed my sleep. Otherwise, I saw no cause for agitation. On viewing the figure thus closely and by daylight, I discovered at once that my supposition had been correct. The figure was an artificial construction, a machine in the shape of a man. There was no room for doubt ; the beard was stiff and lifeless, the features mask-like, the eyes of glass. It had been merely the effect of distance and uncertain light which had deceived me. I spoke my thoughts aloud.

"It is, then, really an automaton."

"It *was* so," returned Froissart, with a curious emphasis. I looked at him inquiringly, not comprehending.

"It *was* so !" I repeated. "And what then is it now ?"

"As I have said," he answered, "an automaton it *was*. What it now is, God knows. Let us be seated, Seldon ; and listen to a most strange story. If you find it not altogether incredible I shall be amazed. And yet of its truth I cannot be less firmly assured than I am of the reality of my own existence."

He paused for a moment ; then resumed :



"This figure—this automaton, since I must call it so—was the invention of my old friend, Martin Sombras. It was devised, as no doubt you have divined, to play a game of chess with an opponent. Many such figures have been constructed, differing more or less in detail, but all depending for their mode of action upon the presence of some human player carefully concealed either within the figure itself, or in a chest upon which the board was placed. Sombras's idea, however, was radically different from these. He conceived the possibility of constructing an automaton which should be really such—that is, such that any move made by its opponent should set in motion a part of its machinery, which would thereupon cause the figure to make the answering move required by the particular combination of the game. Impossible as this may seem at first sight, the method by which it was accomplished was in reality wonderfully simple. Indeed, if you are acquainted with certain devices of somewhat similar nature—Babbage's calculating machine for example—you will be aware that this is not the only instance in which machinery has been made to accomplish, by most simple combinations, results apparently impossible."

I admitted that this was so.

"I need not then go into details," continued Froissart, "which are, moreover, unnecessary to my story. I may just mention, however, that the squares of the board are movable, and the men are variously weighted. The fact is, the design was never completed. Three months ago, just as it was finished, requiring only a screw or so to be put in, Sombras died, as I have told you.

"I must now relate to you more particularly the manner of his death. It was one evening when we were engaged as usual in playing chess. The game was an absorbing one. It was the last of a series which we had been playing in order to test the merits of an opening which Sombras had discovered, and which, with the fondness of a discoverer, he held to be invincible. For some time I had maintained the contrary; yet, as Sombras beat me game after game, I began to feel shaken in my opinion. At last, however, I believed I had discovered a weakness in his method. That game was to decide it. If I failed this time, there could be little doubt that Sombras had hit upon a discovery which might revolutionise the game.

"We began to play; and it seemed that I had been right. The move I had devised appeared to have broken up the attack; so at least I thought as I sat waiting for Sombras to reply to it. He was already putting out his hand to do so when to my horror

he paused, uttered a deep groan, and sank back in his chair—insensible. Perhaps the excitement, the strain of thought, had brought on the attack; which is the more probable as his health was at that time perilously feeble. But whatever was the cause, the result was terribly sure. He was carried to his room, doctors were sent for, and arrived—too late! Long before they came, my old friend was dead.”

Froissart paused, and his voice trembled. I said nothing; and presently he resumed:

“I have hurried over this part of my story as briefly as possible, for the deep pain of it is with me still. It was by far the saddest moment of my life when I returned from the melancholy duty of following his coffin to the vault, to this old house where he and I had lived together so long. The evening of that day was gloomy and depressing; a low cloud brooded over the country like a pall; a fine and steady rain fell dolefully. Melancholy and sick at heart I roamed aimlessly and in silence through the empty house, regarding in every room the well-remembered tokens of my dead friend. At last my restless wanderings brought me to the tower—to this apartment. It was already dark when I entered it, and I carried in my hand no lamp.

“The room, I say, was dark when I entered it, and I struck a light and kindled the swinging lamp. As it began to glimmer fitfully, and to throw a doubtful light about the interior, my heart all of a sudden gave a great bound, and then seemed to stop beating. I was not alone! Someone was sitting there in the middle of the room. For some minutes, as the lamp glimmered and spluttered and would not blaze up into a clear flame, I stood there with a shivering feeling, only able to make out that a dark and silent figure, a mysterious presence, was before me. In another moment the lamp flamed up brightly and gave forth a clear light. What a delicious sensation of relief I felt! The startling object, on becoming visible, turned out to be nothing more terrible than the automaton, which I had quite forgotten, seated as usual before his little table.

“I broke into a laugh at my own folly, not without a reflection that my nervous system must certainly be out of order. To think of my being frightened by that familiar figure, which I had seen a hundred times, sitting there so tranquilly before his chequered board! The sight of it touched me with a strange sense of the pathetic. I remembered how it had been for years the occupation and the delight of my old friend, to work at it, to calculate for it, to invent for it new movements and improved details. I knew how it had come to form at last—this creature



of his brain—the interest of his life. He had loved it, as it grew into perfection, as a parent loves an only child. And now he would never watch it play a game, as he had planned; never see the moment on which his heart had been set. And he had died moreover, leaving unaccomplished the one other ambition of his life, to have linked his name immortally to the game he loved, as the inventor of a new and grand and revolutionary opening.

“My thoughts, however, were suddenly diverted into another channel. I was struck with a discovery which puzzled me greatly. The chessmen on the table at which the figure sat were not ranged in order as at the commencement of play, but were stationed irregularly about the board, as in the position of an unfinished game. Several pieces on both sides had been taken, and lay on the table beside the board. But what amazed me was the fact, that the position of the men on the squares was perfectly familiar to me. I recognised it in an instant; I could not be mistaken. It was the game which I and Sombras had last played together, and which had been broken off on account of his attack.

“I say I was amazed, and with good reason—my poor friend had never, I knew well, entered that room after his seizure. Who then had placed the men in the position they now occupied? The more I thought of this matter the more unaccountable it seemed. Yet there could be no doubt of the fact. In order to be sure that the positions were indeed identical I examined the board closely, in case I should have been deceived by a partial similarity. But no; the pieces stood man for man as I remembered them. I even recollected to what the move I had made seemed to lead up, and what I had intended to play afterwards—a move which opened out an exceedingly interesting and novel combination. The move was possibly unsound; and yet I believed that I had analysed it correctly. As I now looked at the board the whole returned to my mind as clearly as when I first conceived it. I found myself repeating in my mind that the only plausible retort on the part of my opponent would be such-and-such a move—P. to Q. B. 3, as a matter of fact. Half unconsciously I took a seat before the board opposite the automaton, and became gradually quite lost in speculation. At length, in order to consider what the effect of my purposed move would be, I placed my hand on the Queen and played the move I contemplated—Q. to K. 5.

“Instantly the figure on the other side of the table stretched out its hand deliberately over the board, and made the answering move—P. to Q. B. 3.

“I will not attempt to describe my amazement. I fell back in my seat and gazed for many minutes in stupefaction at the figure

of the automaton; nor could I, during that time, had my very life depended on the action, have risen from my seat or uttered a sound. The figure sat there motionless, with its eyes apparently fixed upon the board. Presently, however, finding that I did not move again, it raised its head and fastened its glassy orbs on mine. There it sat, looking at me with large mild eyes, which now (I am ready to swear it) seemed to be *alive*. Great Heavens! Oh, ancient earth and sky! It *must* have been my fancy! I thought the face of the figure *now* bore a strange and dim, yet frightfully distinct, resemblance to the features of old Martin Sombras, its dead creator.

“At that sight my blood ran chill and my hair rose up. Had I beheld before me the ghostly presence of Sombras in his own likeness, I believe I should have still preserved some degree of self-possession. But there was something in this manner of his appearance which shook my very heart. I do not know how long it was before I could collect my faculties sufficiently to become conscious of the unreasonableness of my fears, and the shame of superstitious terrors in an intellectual being. Was not this spirit—if spirit it were—that of my old friend? What harm would it do me, even if it had the power? Reflecting thus, and summoning up what courage I had left, I made an effort to speak, and this time my voice, though strangely altered, returned.

“‘Sombras,’ I said earnestly, though my voice quavered, ‘if you are here indeed, though by what mysterious means I know not, speak to me! What would you have me do?’

“The figure was silent; only its eyes rested intently on the board.

“‘I understand,’ I said; ‘I am ready. Yet if you have the power of speech, I charge you, by our ancient friendship, speak to me, Sombras!’

“The eyes of the figure burned with a strange fire; but it answered not a word.

“‘This game, so strangely set,’ I said—‘do you desire to play it?’

“I thought the figure bowed its head. Its eyes were still fixed upon the board as if impatient to proceed. I *dared* make no delay. I trembled, but I no longer hesitated. I knew my move beforehand, and I made it. The right hand of the figure immediately extended itself over the board, and made the answering move.

“It was not a move which I had expected; I was surprised. Strange as it may seem, impossible as it may seem to any but a true disciple of the game (and to such it will appear natural, and indeed inevitable), in spite of the sensation with which my veins



were chill, I became interested, then absorbed. I thought I saw the object of the move; but I was not certain. I did not move without deliberation; but again, as soon as I had played, my opponent, without the hesitation of an instant, stretched forth his hand and moved in his turn. This extreme promptitude surprised me at the time; I did not reflect that I was not playing against flesh and blood.

“Moreover, the move itself perplexed me. I saw that the advantage I had gained was vanishing. I began to tremble with excitement, as I had lately trembled with dread. And yet I know I played my very best; my senses seemed to myself extraordinarily acute. The combination which I had devised again appeared irresistible—a stratagem certain of success. I had the game within my grasp; I thought myself on the point of victory. Suddenly, as my opponent moved a piece, a low sound caused me to look up. The automaton was regarding me with a full gaze; and *now*, it was unmistakable, the resemblance in its features to those of Martin Sombras was no figment of my brain. The look was exactly that unmalignant glance of triumph with which my old friend had been accustomed to announce a victory. Involuntarily I cast my eyes down to the board. I could hardly believe what I saw; I was checkmated!

“For the first time I saw it all. I saw before me the most subtle combination which ever proceeded from a human brain. I believe it to be impossible for any ingenuity to have seen through such a movement. Many times since have I played over the game in solitude, and proved to demonstration that the mate, from the moment we began to play, was inevitable against that evolution, so veiled, so overwhelming. Sombras’s theory had, after all, been sound.

“So deeply was I absorbed in wonder and admiration, that I half forgot the strange antagonist to whom I owed my defeat. When shall I forget—I never shall forget—the circumstance which recalled me to myself? A slight noise, I know not what, caused me to look up. I raised my eyes and looked again at the figure. As I did so, the resemblance which had existed to the face of my old friend, suddenly vanished. The eyes again became glassy, empty, and devoid of speculation; the life, the movement, which had animated the figure died out of it; and there was nothing left before me but mere wood and painted cloth. It was as if I had seen my old friend die twice.

“Up to that moment I had preserved my faculties, if not from amazement and trepidation, yet from the full sense of an unearthly presence, which now rushed across my spirit in a flood.

The excitement which had buoyed me up, deserted me. The lifeless eyes of the figure, vacantly staring, seemed now a thousand times more awful than their previous supernatural life. I could bear no more. Hardly knowing what I did, nor whither I was going, I staggered from the room, and from the house."

Again Froissart paused; I thought he had finished his story; but presently he resumed:

"Many days passed before the terrors of that night gave way to a calmer, if not less solemn feeling. Then a most strange idea took possession of me, and left me not a moment's rest or peace of mind. *What if the spirit should return?* Something persuaded me that it *would* return; that at some time, which I could not foretell, the mysterious fire would once more kindle in the glassy eyes, the living likeness waken in the vacant features, the startling hand extend itself over the table, and I should play yet another game of chess with my old friend. Reasonable or unreasonable, the persuasion took firm hold of me, and possessed, as it still possesses, my whole being. Not a night has passed since then but, under an uncontrollable impulsion, I have taken my seat, never without a thrill of awed expectation, before the table, and making the first move, waited for the figure to reply. Hitherto, I have waited in vain. Last night, as the nights before, it did not stir. To-night—*it may!*"

### CHAPTER III.

As Froissart uttered the last words of his most strange story, I will not deny that I shivered, as if with cold. Evening was beginning to fall, and the light of the room was shadowy, haunted, and uncertain. On the other side of the table sat the mysterious figure, motionless, spectral in the twilight, and looked at us silently with its glassy eyes.

We sat in silence. I knew not what to think. Had I not heard the story from Froissart himself, I should doubtless have judged him, as he had said, to be mad or dreaming; it was necessary to have heard him, and to have watched him to be *sure* that he was not. And yet there was an alternative; the whole might have been a hallucination. What was there to show that it was not so, that it was not the illusion of a disturbed and excited brain? As if I had put the question aloud, Froissart answered my unspoken thought.

"Hallucination?" he said. "You think so, naturally—and certainly I thought so also the next morning. I was then as cool



and collected as ever I was in my life, I mean as far as my *intellect* was concerned; and I was disposed to laugh at my own wildness of imagination, which had played me such a prank. I easily persuaded myself that I had been, as you suppose, merely the victim of a singular delusion. I told myself that it *must* be so—and I added that at least I could not *prove* it otherwise.”

“Very true,” I interposed.

“But as I was thus thinking, a sudden thought came into my head. I *could* prove it. I had but to go to the tower and examine the position of the chessmen on the board. If they stood as usual, I had been deceived. If not——”

“Well?” I said hastily. “Well, you went?”

“I went,” said Froissart, “I opened the door, laughing at my agitation, repeating to myself that I should find the pieces drawn up in rank, and there would be an end of the mystery—a proved delusion. I had played, as it happened, with the black men——”

“Well?” I said again.

“The pieces were stationed irregularly about the board. The Black King was checkmated.”

Again, as Froissart spoke, my mind fell back upon itself, foiled and disconcerted. I could not deny the cogency of his argument; nor could I forget, what he himself knew nothing of, the strangeness of my own sensations in the presence of that mysterious figure. I said nothing.

“Seldon,” said Froissart, after a time, “I have told you my story. I see that you are shaken. Do you now believe as I am forced to believe, or do you not?”

“I do,” I said; “I must,”—at the same time I started from my seat. “I must, Froissart. But another thing is clear to me—that this figure is likely to kill you before long. If the apparition comes again, you will die of shock; if it does not, you will die of tension. Neither shall happen if I can help it—of that I am determined. To you, Martin Sombras, whether in the flesh or in the spirit, is rightly sacred. To me, a living friend is more than a dead stranger or a wandering spectre. Come!”

With these words I advanced upon the turbaned figure, and before Froissart could prevent me, or indeed become aware of my intention, I seized it in my arms, and bore it towards the open window.

It was the only window in the castle which was of modern size, a fact which arose from its having been enlarged for the purpose of giving sufficient light for the working of delicate mechanism. Sheer below it, at an immense depth, lay the lake, gloomy with the coming night. Exerting all my strength I

raised the figure to the lintel, and launched it forth into the empty space.

It fell like a plummet. I watched it falling.

Heavy internally with brass and iron, it struck the water with amazing force. A cloud of spray flashed upwards and the space around it whitened and seethed with violence. Nothing was to be seen except the agitated water. The figure had vanished like a stone.

It was gone—eternally gone! Evil or harmless, earthly or supernal, it was gone, and its mystery with it. Even as I looked the lake resumed its sombre and undisturbed and fathomless lustre. Its waters slept again their sleep of death and night. The automaton was buried in their depths—for ever.

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A few words only need be added. A month has passed since that night, and Froissart is himself again; though assuredly both to him and to me the recollection of the automaton will remain lastingly connected with the most inexplicable experience of our lives. The “perturbed spirit” of old Martin Sombras may also rest in peace, his life’s ambition being attained. His great gambit, so nearly lost, so amazingly revealed, will shortly appear before the world, edited with notes and analysis by Philip Froissart; and will assuredly create, among chess circles, a paroxysm of excitement, the result of which I will not attempt to prophesy.

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## Merstham Steeple.

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It was the height of summer. The Queen and the Prince were to arrive at the castle that afternoon. All the countryside was on tiptoe with excitement, and the preparations for the progress were in all men's mouths. Some were eager to tell of the triumphal arches which were to greet Her Majesty at every few miles of her long drive. Some were full of the great banquet and ball that were making ready at the Castle. Some were agog with the names and dignities of the Duke's guests, and some with the periods and panegyric of the vicar's address of welcome. To me all this was interesting enough, but I was too inconsiderable to play any part in the pageant, and too old to find any lasting entertainment in the bare repetition and foretaste of the wonders to come. "Let those rehearse," said I, "that are to recite, and gossip that have breath to spare. I can see the cavalcade from the Steeple, while it is still in the next parish, and follow it for miles across the plain, while these yokels are waiting at the cross-roads. I will betake me to the tower and enjoy the spectacle in quiet."

Merstham Steeple is one of the features of our side of the county. The great old tower stands with its foot well planted on the edge of the moor, and gazes proud and vigilant over many miles of plain, and moss, and woodland. Who built it is not known, but he must have been of a daring and munificent strain; for the tower was built without any nave or chancel, and equipped with rich carving and a noble peal of bells. To finish the work was not within his compass, but there stands his stately fragment admonishing a more niggard posterity to a like generosity with the founder. Posterity has basely betrayed his hopes. No church rose to match the splendid tower; and still it stands, lonely and undaunted, a mere chamber for bells, and a school of change-ringers of much fame. Artists and antiquarians visit it and command from it a sweep of most excellent landscape, but few from our village ever go that way except when the ringers go up to ring a peal.

So I climbed the weary stairs and took up my station on the platform of the bells. The belfry is the floor of the tower level with the ground, and is roofed over at ten feet height; and from



that belfry ceiling to the tower roof there is no break or barrier, except where, about midway, great beams span the abyss and carry the bells. The peal is large, in number ten, and because the louvres are but small, the bells are crowded together level with the orifices, so that the sound of them all may have the same ample exit. I stood on the narrow window-ledge from which I expected to see the royal procession, and peered through the openings. The sun was blazing down in full power, spreading over the plain a thin and quivering haze, through which shone the moss with a princely glow of purple, and the silver band of the river wound and wandered at the foot of the great hanger. Under the hill the village nestled sleepy and belated. The tiled roofs in the sunlight scorched the eye that looked upon them. I could see the banner on the castle tower cling in sullen folds round its flagstaff ready for hoisting, and a twinkle on the road by Burwood, told me where our gallant troop of yeomanry was drawn up with gleaming swords and pawing chargers, waiting to lay their service at the feet of their sovereign. A faint and indolent lowing now and again floated up from the meadows, and an idle dog of the keeper's bayed with fitful energy. The air was thick and faint with the richness of the bean flowers, and a slight hum rose up to me from the myriads of bees busy in the beans far below. A stray red admiral was coquetting and pluming on one of the louvres, opening and closing his glorious wings, and from the ivy on the wall a faint occasional cheep, a harsher croak, or the rustle of the leaves, told of the swifts and daws who lurked and enjoyed their siesta in the inviolable shelter of the creepers.

The whole scene was one of unmatched beauty, English in every line, breathing happiness, contentment, and repose. I strained my eyes gazing into the distance, but still the road by which the Queen was to come remained white and untenanted, dusty and torrid as Sahara, and very fatiguing to the mind's eye as well as to the body's. Poised upon my narrow window-sill, I found my position very cramped, and grew weary of hanging on to the louvre with one hand while I shielded my eyes with the other. If I was to remain ensconced here, and in this pose, I was like to be fairly spent before the procession came ever in sight. The hour, the scene, and the hush, alike hinted and designed repose. "I had better have stayed on the bench outside the Cord and Cowl," said I, "than have toiled up these weary steps to hang on here for an hour. Am I a fly that I should stick upon a pane, or take a walk upside down to beguile the time? I had better sit down somewhere. There is nothing to be seen out of window except the miller's bull trying to get into the vicar's

flower-garden, and I shall have plenty of warning, for by the time the party comes in sight, they will be ringing Thoresby bells." So I looked round to find a seat.

This was a more difficult matter. I might descend to the belfry, but as I looked at the forty feet of steep ladders below me, I scouted the very thought. To perch on the ladder at any of its narrow rungs was insecure, and distressing to the hams, and, as for my window-sill, nothing but cobbler's wax or crucifixion would have given me any fixity of tenure. So I edged out on to a great beam, which crossed from wall to wall just under the bells to stay up the tower against their swing and jar, and as I am not over fond of dangling my legs and kicking my heels over forty feet of dark and gloomy space, and the baulk was of a commodious and roomy dimension, I lay down on my back and listened for Thoresby peal.

The posture was convenient for thought, and I mused for some time of various high matters. The tyrant sun spied me out upon my beam, and beat fiercely in upon me, till I thought in that abundant glow that I should become quite crisp and inflammable. I closed my eyes and shut him out; but presently a new disquiet began to plague me, for a most impertinent and intrusive knot in the timber bored into my shoulder-blade, and wrung me with anguish. Still keeping my eyes closed against the sunlight, I edged gingerly along upon my back until I found an easier spot, and there I settled myself. I debated for a while upon the virtues of our young Queen and the conduct of Sir Robert, weighed the Vicar's last sermon on the inhabitants of the ark and their types, reprobated the scoffs which Welt the Chartist cobbler aimed at it; wondered why the taxes were so high, and wished the Ministry at perdition, and so arrived at a very composed and benignant frame of mind. But I thought they were very long in ringing the bells at Thoresby.

Whish! whish! whish! clang! clang!! clang!!! clang!!!! clang!!!!!! I thought it was the Day of Judgment or the day after, opened my heavy eyes and was starting up when I sank back and stiffened out like a corpse. There I saw in the gloom, a great cavern of darkness widen and swoop down over me, and Great Bartlemy, our tenor bell, brushed over my prostrate body, his great clapper swinging like the tongue between Behemoth's jaws, and as he reached the end of his swing he clanged out a dizzy and appalling boom at my very ears. A plague on my carelessness! Our bells are so hung that when not in use, they are locked slightly atilt, and do not depend to the lowest point of their sweep. The stay on which I was resting they

clear by but a few inches, and I, my eyes closed against the sun, had edged further and further out, not observing their position, till I lay just where the course of the tenor crossed the beam. There, lulled by the heat and the hum, I had fallen asleep, and while I lay supine, the day had waned, and Thoresby bells had rung, and the Queen had come and gone, and the ringers had left the procession for the belfry, unhitched the bells, and begun their peal.

It was the first swish of the bells sweeping through the air that woke me, their first raucous clang that completed my awakening; and now there I lay, a prisoner, not daring to stir an inch, timing my breath to the beat of the bells lest a fuller inflation of my chest as Bartlemy passed over me should bring me in contact with his lip and I be brushed from my beam like a fly. Peter and Paul, the next two bells, hung on Bartlemy's either hand and shaved my stay even more closely. My retreat was cut off; advance was impossible; between them and the timber there was clearly no room for passage. Just where I lay the swinging bell cleared me, and there till the ringing was over and the bells once more hitched up askew and wide of the beam, I must needs remain.

By now the sun was off the tower, and through the louvres I could see in glimpses between the swaying bells the glow of the evening sky. Upon the olive green a wreath of golden vapour hung light and feathery; the evening star gleamed jewel-like upon the forehead of the coming night. The swift, hardy and fearless of the uproar, hawked the flies up and down, cutting sharp arcs across the windows, and here and there the devious wayward flight of a bat, blackened the sky. I think there was a night breeze blowing sharply off the moor, for the wind, churned by the bells, dragged into fitful eddies in the damp tower chamber as the sun-heated walls cooled irregularly, blew wet upon me in gusts a perfect gale. Over my head Bartlemy's huge mouth was perpetually opening and shutting, and he swept aside only to disclose a vista of neighbour giants cutting inexorable curves to right and left, barring all escape and gathering momentum with the minutes, till the tower swayed bodily to right and left with every peal, and my timber beam thrilled, and quivered, and buckled up and down like an unruly race-horse. The tearing turbulent wind snatched me on either side tumultuously, and the jarring and upheaved dance of stone and timber in the fabric threatened each instant to hurl me like a pebble from a sling into the gloomy abyss below. To preserve myself from this my most instant jeopardy, and to escape the sick giddiness of terror which the unchanging menace of the swingiug bells drove deep into my



heart, I gingerly, and with an eye over my shoulder for Bartlemy the pursuing fiend, turned over on my breast and hugged the beam with the grip of my knees and extended arms.

Hitherto in my more imminent trouble I had not so much noticed the uproar of the bells. True that the tenor roared in his great voice not ten feet from my ear, that the treble bells cried shrilly overhead, and Peter and Paul bawled and bellowed a sonorous harmony; the arched roof and quivering walls reverberated the sound and hurled it out over my body through the louvres into the night. The tower having neither floors nor joists to break the waves, vibrated and redoubled the din like a sounding board. Yet while each spring of my beam was lifting me inches towards the descending bell and those awful circular orifices were dizzily swooping over me like birds of prey, their mere din was the least of my troubles. But now the ringers began to fire the bells, and the volleys discharged over my head like a million of anvils rattling to the sledge, beat into my brain with a fierce remorseless tyranny. They began to ring, what at its third bell I noted with a prescient and appalling plunge into the pit of despair, a Triple Grandsire Major set of changes. These things take hours to execute, and our conceited pedants of ringers bate not a jot of them. And how long would my shaken nerves and tortured muscles hold out?

Minute by minute I lay there sicker and sicker and more and more unstrung. In the voices of the bells and the shrill yelling of the wind, I heard all the demons of the pit shrieking in my ear, "Let go! Let go!" Ceaseless, endless, only more monotonous for its measured variety, came that series of metallic explosions, bursting through the whirlpool of ringing resonance, the débris of each note as it died, and knocking, knocking upon my skull with veritable and agonising blows. I felt my reason totter, and to save myself tried by reflection to win at least a few moments of respite from madness. I shouted with all the force of my throat, but for all my effort could hear not a sound of it. "If I cannot hear myself," said I, "how shall they hear me in the belfry? Yet hear me they must," and I strained my eyes through the gloom. Then an expedient occurred to me, and a spark of hope kindled in my darkness and blazed up like a wisp of straw in a wind. Slowly and painfully I got off one of my heavy boots and then the other, and dropped the first on to the belfry ceiling so far below. The bells rang on; my young hope paled and flickered. "Perhaps the boot fell on the upper side; I must make the heel strike first," I said: "they will hear that;" and carefully I launched my other boot, sole downwards. Still that infernal tumult beat and battered

down upon me, "Curse on the oafs," I screamed inaudibly, "they are drunk, drunk, the sots!" and I lay on my belly and left off to clutch the log and wailed like a newborn child.

How long I remained thus spent and unmanned I know not; but the love of life is strong, and presently, when the light was now well nigh faded out of the sky, a new device was born in my brain. "The second boot as the first," I said to myself, "fell on its soft upper side and bounded off. No wonder they did not hear it. This will fall with a more piercing crack; it may even break a way through some rotten spot in the boards," and detaching my watch from its chain, with a beating heart and all my last remnants of strength and nerve mustered and hanging on the cast, I poised it a moment, opened my fingers and it vanished.

There was a moment's suspense and then all was still. The awful racket in which my torn and harassed brain had reeled and crouched as it seemed through such interminable ages, suddenly ceased. Warm tears gushed from my eyes and lay glittering in the gloom in great drops on the beam, and there I lay panting and whispering, so outworn and feeble that even in that great silence I did not hear my own words, "Thank God! Thank God! my prayer is heard."

But still the tower jerked and swayed, and the wind blew gusty and chill. "I will get to the ladders and go down to meet them," thought I, "perhaps they are gone for a rope," and turning over I half rose to my feet. Great God in heaven! I fell flat again, not by a hair's breadth too soon; the great bells were still beating and bellowing, jangling, swinging and quivering over my head without any pause just as before; and I—I heard not a sound of it, nor shall I ever hear again for evermore till I hear the trumpet of the Judgment Angel.

There then I lay a space longer, whether minutes or hours I knew not, for time was for me no longer; and half in a trance of exhaustion, half in a stupor of despair, I lay all along, and glared hopeless into the vault. But I knew by the pulsing of my perch that the fierce ringing of the bells still was answered by the quivering and jar of the walls and of my beam. Some hidden law of the construction of the building caused my beam to reach its lowest point of vibration, just as Bartlemy swept over it, and when he was inverted at the limit of his swing, then it was that the stay humped itself to its highest. This motion had saved my life, else I must have been cut off into the void a mere shattered heap with the first descent of the bell. And yet why should I have clung to life? at that moment I had as lieve have died. But still the buckling of the stay raised me up and down and

mechanically my despairing fingers clutched it as a strangler gripes his victim.

Suddenly something touched me on the back; then again a finger seemed to be lightly drawn a fraction of an inch across me. I cowered lower and lower at this new terror, and did not feel it a third time. No! there it is again; rhythmically, evenly, inexorably laying itself upon me again and again, as if the angel of death himself were marking me for destruction. At each touch I thought it fell more heavily, nor could I any longer shrink away from that strange ghostly hand. Then I suddenly felt it hot as well as heavy, hot as a hand of fire. The new horror cast out the old, and all my wits bent themselves in the darkness upon that one weird visitation. Ha! I had it. The hours of ringing had heated Bartlemy, and the clapper of the bell was lengthening. Thousands of strokes of iron on iron had made that tongue so hot that it had expanded by little and little, until now it reached down across my little margin of safety, and his—Bartlemy's—was the finger that touched me so rhythmically, pressing heavier and heavier as it reached further and further down, and in very truth the hand was the hand of death. And death looked me straight in the eyes remorseless and uncompromising. Unless heaven intervened to help me, my life was to be measured by minutes, and I was to die by inches.

Perhaps heaven did help me; for now over the shoulder of one of the higher bells, by which it still suffered momentary eclipses, the moon began to shine in on me through the louvres. And as I gazed about for help in the new light with fevered and fear-stricken eyes, I caught sight of the nearest of the bell-ropes, running down a quivering silver cord and losing itself in the solid night below. It rose and fell as the brawny ringer's arms pulled it. I looked aloft and saw it was Catherine's, the second bell's rope, and the ringer of Catherine I knew was Roger, my second son. I think that gave me hope, and indeed my peril was now so near, that delay and design would in a moment more be my ruin. My coat was torn to shreds, and a hot furrow was being seared deeper and deeper in my shoulder with every stroke. Slowly, and crouching as close as a lizard, I writhed along the beam. But in this way I could make but little progress, for before my body was clear of the pursuing pendulum of Bartlemy's clapper, the way was cut across by the steady sweep of his neighbour bell, and between that and the beam was no hope of a passage for me. I dropped over the side, and clinging with feet and hands to the underside of the beam, wormed painfully along. I felt the blood buzzing in my head, and my eyeballs swelled almost to bursting; the muscles



stood out upon my legs and arms like cordage, but I knew that the time I could thus hang must be counted by moments. I crossed one leg over the stay and gained some rest, though at every swing the bell's edge cut and cut into the thigh; but that was no time to think of such things; and then in the moonlight I saw one, and one only, desperate way of escape. If I could throw myself on to the stay in the very instant when the two bells, that crossed it just above me, were swinging away in opposite directions, then before they returned I might poise myself, and leaping out into space, clutch my son's bell rope, and sliding down so reach firm footing below. It was a gambler's last throw, and the odds were terrible. From such a feat, requiring the nicest balance of eye and limb, the most instant obedience of the muscle to the will, the fullest force of body and coolest decision of mind, even a gymnast, trained and untired, might shrink. And how was I, deafened and dazed, limp and quivering, nerveless and unstrung, to make that desperate adventure? And what was the penalty of failure? To be nipped and ground between the returning bells and be dropped a lifeless carcase, or leaping, to miss my hold, and falling endlong, to be dashed against the unseen platform far below.

But in such a match men do not count the odds or stop to haggle about the stakes with Death. I fixed my eyes upon the bells, and counted and recounted their sweeps till the pulsation was burnt into my brain. Then boldly, yet without haste, I cast myself on to the upper surface of the beam, rose deftly to my feet, poised myself as it switched, and fastened my gaze not on the bells but on the rope. As the rope rose to its topmost limit and paused before its descent, as one bell ended its swing, and the other began its merciless pounce upon its quarry, I crouched and bounded, and my hands closed in death grips upon the cord. My arms strained in their sockets; like a streak of molten iron the rope slid through my palms, burning and tearing them, and then my feet touched the planks below and I was safe. I stumbled and tottered to the ladder, and almost fell into the belfry below. The Triple Grandsire Major was just at an end, and the singers as they dropped their ropes were clustering round my son Roger. He lifted his hand, and his lips moved, and I saw by their motion that he cried, "God save the Queen." The yokels were not prompt to take him up, I reeled into their midst, and lifting my hand too, croaked like a voice from the tomb, "Ay! God save the Queen." With starting eyes and bristling hair they marked my gaunt blanched cheeks, my clothes ragged and blood-bedabbled, and my snow-white beard and hair, and one and all gibbering and aghast, they fled headlong.

## Gustave Doré.

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It was a gala day at Strasburg in the year 1840. A statue of Guttenberg was to be erected in the old Herb Market, and a grand cortège representing the industrial corporation of the city was to parade the streets with every demonstration of public rejoicing.

Foremost amongst the guilds came that of the printers, in honour of their illustrious master; and next, that of the glass-stainers, Strasburg enjoying the reputation of being pre-eminent in the art of glass-staining; then followed the coopers, and the gardeners, and fourteen or fifteen chariots filled with important personages and holiday-makers. Gustave Doré, then eight years old (having been born on Twelfth Day, 1832), was the most rapt spectator of the fête. The streets decorated with triumphal arches, the balconies with their flowers and gay coloured draperies, the flags flying, the bands playing, impressed him vividly and deeply. He was everywhere, and saw everything. It was remarked that as soon as the day's pleasure was over, it appeared to have become to him a thing of the past, he never spoke of it, and the memory of the whole affair seemed to have been swept out of his mind.

Not very long after, however, it was proposed, in the school where he and his brother had been placed, to keep the fête day of the master, Professor Vergnette, in some special manner. The boys held council together, and Gustave quietly suggested that they should reproduce the fête of Guttenberg. This was declared to be a wild and impossible scheme, but Gustave offered to take charge of the whole affair and be responsible for everything. On the appointed day everything was in readiness. Four chariots drawn by some of the school boys were filled with the representatives of the four corporations. Gustave himself was at the head of the glass-stainers, got up as a mediæval artist, in a Rubens hat and paper ornaments. His brother Ernest commanded the painters' association, and Arthur Kratz (afterwards a distinguished man, and Doré's life-long friend and companion), personified the chief cooper.

Whilst marching round the Cathedral Square they would stop now and then to work at their different trades: the gardeners made bouquets and flung them to the crowd; papers were issued from the printing press, and Doré made sketches of the people, and when

someone recognised a striking likeness, it was realized that he was making real drawings.

They finally drew up before the Professor's house, and presented him with their four banners. These were perhaps the most marvellous of Doré's achievements, for all the insignia upon them had been drawn from memory. The printers' banner displayed presses and papers, the coopers' all their old craft symbols, and on his own he had painted the ancient lantern of the "*Peintres verriers*" in the form of a star with coloured glass points, and at its base a well-known stained-glass window of the cathedral. In giving these details M. Kratz observes that this was the starting-point of his career, and that, of all the precocious feats performed by youths whose talents raised them above the common level, never was known such a prodigy as Gustave Doré proved himself to be when quite a little child, planning and successfully carrying out such a marvellous imitation of the fête of Guttenberg as he then executed from memory.

After this memorable day, the constant assertion of Gustave's mother that her son was a genius began to be believed, and in the evening, when the Doré family assembled in the common drawing-room, his father, a civil engineer, with his plans, the grandmother with her favourite copy of 'Racine,' Ernest and Emile playing at soldiering, Gustave would sit at his little table drawing quaint figures in his copy-book. Nothing, it would be thought, could be less likely to produce the wild flights of fancy which afterwards distinguished his "*crayon vertigineux*" than this peaceful monotonous home life. Whence could have come the extravagant dreams, the lurid lights, the strange lugubrious forms with which he loved to people scenes of every imaginable horror? Nor did there ever come a time when this mild domesticity was exchanged for experiences more likely to foster fantastic imaginings. His life was wholly uneventful; his own family were his chosen companions, and no place was so full of enjoyment to him as his own studio and his own fireside. At nine years old, Doré was sent to the Strasburg College, and from thence to the Lycée Charlemagne in Paris, where his reputation for drawing had already preceded him. Long before his school days were over he had begun to illustrate Balzac, Rabelais, and Eugène Sue; he paid for his own tuition by illustrating comic journals, but it never entered into his head to take lessons in drawing, and, although at one time he half lived in the galleries of the Louvre, he was never seen to copy the smallest work. He would constantly be remarked making notes in a little memorandum-book, but never copied faces or figures. In the year 1848 M. Doré died, leaving only a small property, which was found barely sufficient to keep his widow and three boys in tolerable comfort. Gustave then



set to work to help his mother with his earnings. She joined him in Paris, and a residence was chosen in the Rue St. Dominique. The house was already famous, having belonged to the Duc de St. Simon. It was spacious and comfortable, but for many years Gustave only occupied a very small chamber leading out of his mother's bed-room, which he often used as a studio, as it was large and well lighted, and he had a particular fancy for working in "mother's room." His own little chamber is still said to bear the aspect of a school boy's sanctum; strewn with photographs, books, and engravings, a bust here and there, and on the wall a small bas-relief of his own profile.

At the age of seventeen Doré took his rank as one of the best designers of the day, and there became no question as to his amazing talent. He was extravagantly delighted with success, and was very ambitious. He felt in his heart that he was an artist, but Paris only regarded him as a draughtsman, a word he deprecated and deeply resented. Unfortunately he was fed, at this time, with an immense amount of injudicious flattery, which led him to discontent and disappointment with more reasonable criticism and truer friends, and to disregard advice that would have placed him ultimately on a higher level. He believed that his exceptional genius emancipated him from treading the uphill road of preliminary study. He could not bear the idea of working upon fixed principles. All that he could be got to do was to hunt up old engravings from masterly originals, learning them as it were by heart, and copying them from memory.

These feats of minute and perfect reproduction were indeed marvels in themselves. Many instances have been given of this aculty, and a notable one from the pen of M. Daubrée, who was his travelling companion one summer in Switzerland, and was surprised to observe that whilst passing through the most exquisite scenery he never made so much as a single sketch. He would sit for hours gazing before him, so quiet that he almost seem stupefied; so that Daubrée at last could not help asking if he did not think enough of the scenery to try to reproduce it.

"Think enough of it, my friend?" said Doré. "Wait, and you shall see." One day they are kept indoors by bad weather, and Gustave did not appear at all. The next morning he invited the party into his room, where he displayed no less than twenty completed studies,—some in oil and some in water-colours—faithful and exquisite sketches of the scenes through which they had passed! He had painted them all from memory; working straight away for more than four and twenty hours.

"His way of getting hold of an idea," adds M. Daubrée, "sitting

down to delineate it, and never stopping till his task was accomplished, was the most extraordinary thing in the world. The way he worked was quite insensate."

At all times an indefatigable worker, his rapidity of execution was so great that he was often reluctant to mention the actual time he had spent upon a drawing. "People would immediately think my pictures were worth nothing," he would say, "if they knew how long I had taken to paint them."

It was in the summer of 1854 that Doré made his first public appearance as a painter. He exhibited two pictures in the Paris Salon, but no notice whatever was taken of them. It was not realized that the illustrator was turning seriously into a painter, nor, in fact, could he afford to abandon the work which meant ready money, for a mere chimera of future greatness. The home in the Rue St. Dominique depended to a great extent upon Doré; it was an expensive one, and lavish in hospitality. He gave himself no rest; and it was said by one of the family that for a whole year he did not sleep on an average more than three hours out of the twenty-four. His life was one continual come and go of publishers, authors, journalists, and the like, and of excitement that never abated; yet he never owned even to a headache, but only worked and worked, and worked.

Arthur Kratz said of him, "It would have killed me to work on like that. I don't know how he managed it; and please observe that this was not an occasional practice, but his daily habit for years! I have often thought about him as I saw him there, and confess that I have never known any other human being who slaved so persistently as he. He never seemed out of temper, was never ill, and rarely ailing; during those first years in Paris he performed miracles, that is all one can say."

In the winter of 1854 and spring of 1855, he completed four large pictures, but they went back to his studio, and connoisseurs said, "He has it all in him but he lacks school." He clung persistently to his own conviction that genius is in itself all-sufficient. He did not believe in the apprenticeship of art. He did not, or would not, believe in the hard fact that no profession can be a legitimate success which has not been learnt through legitimate means.

In 1868 Doré came to London, and found the fame as a painter which his countrymen had so resolutely denied him. In France he was acknowledged to be the greatest illustrator of his time. His genius was admitted, and his intuition as a translator, but it was asserted and reasserted that he had no school in painting, no practical knowledge of fundamental rules. The mechanical training upon

which the art of painting absolutely insists was absent from his work. A few years ago it was said to a distinguished French amateur then in England, "Come to Bond Street and see the pictures of your greatest living painter." And this was the reply, "What? Doré our greatest painter? You mean *your* greatest painter. He is our greatest illustrator; but a painter—never! He is neither greatest nor great; indeed we never knew he was a painter at all until you told us so."

In England there was no doubt as to Doré's popularity. His grand illustrated classics had won for him an enthusiastic appreciation before the Doré Gallery had begun to draw its crowds; and when the 'Neophyte,' the 'Christian Martyrs,' and the 'Dream of Pilate's Wife' appeared, they were at once accepted as among the noblest works of art.

Well received as he was everywhere, the hero of dinners, balls, and fêtes, he was always longing for the old home life in the Rue St. Dominique. His love for his mother was absorbing; and at the age of forty he lived with her just as if he had been a child. After her death he described himself as most unhappy and heart-broken. In a pathetic letter to his friend, Canon Harford, he writes, "Work does not console me—nothing consoles me; for I am alone, alone, alone, without family and almost without friends. Existence has no longer any charm for me, for I have had the improvidence not to know how to build up a home for myself, and some one to lean upon. Without that, life is but a cursed and absurd thing."

The solitude of the great artist, who was a man with a boy's heart, a woman's tenderness, and a poet's fancy, did not last very long. Only a year later another funeral took place from the Rue St. Dominique, and some of the most distinguished men in France followed the cortège. The address spoken over the grave was by Alexandre Dumas, and amidst the last expressions of reverence and regret were these remarkable words, "In France, in France alone people often passed ironically, or what is worse still, indifferently before those grand canvases of which the composition and the idea were always majestic." Doré suffered horribly from not having been understood. Who was wrong? He who suffered, or he who did not understand? The painter who aspired to the applause of the world, or the passer-by who refused it to him?

C. E. MEETKERKE.

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## The Conscript.

A STORY OF TELEPATHY. *From* BALZAC.

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### PART I.

ON a certain evening in November, 1793, all the principal personages in Carentan were gathered together in the drawing-room of Madame de Dey, the only lady in the place who held what was then and there known as an "assembly," every night. Circumstances which would have attracted no attention in a large town, but which were enough to create a flutter in a little one, lent a peculiar interest to this habitual gathering on the present occasion. For two nights running Madame de Dey had closed her doors to her customary guests, on the plea of indisposition. Now the effect produced at Carentan by the occurrence of so serious an interruption of the normal course of things can only be fairly likened to the effect produced at Paris by the unexpected closing of all the theatres.

In 1793 it was at the imminent risk of their lives that the French noblesse made even the slightest departure from the ordinary tenour of their every-day existence. In order that the reader may understand the lively curiosity of all this great lady's guests when they re-assembled in her reception rooms on the third evening, and may be able to enter into her own secret perplexities, we will explain the position which she occupied at Carentan.

The widow of a lieutenant-general and Knight of the orders of St. Michael and St. George, Madame de Dey had quitted the French Court at the commencement of the "emigration." Owning extensive landed property in the immediate neighbourhood of Carentan, she had retired to this estate of hers, in the hope that the influence of "the Terror" would be but little felt in that remote quarter; and this forecast proved correct. The ravages of the Revolution in Lower Normandy were very limited. Now, although Madame de Dey, when spending the summer months at her country-seat, associated only with people belonging to her own caste, she had prudently opened the doors of her mansion in Carentan to the leading *bourgeois* of the town, and to the persons whom the new order of things had clothed with official authority, thereby doing violence to her own feelings, but rendering them proud of having secured her acquaintanceship. Naturally gracious, and endowed with that undefinable

gentleness of disposition which can please without self-abasement, she had won the esteem of all her neighbours by an exquisite tact, which taught her how to adapt her behaviour to the requirements of this mixed society, without wounding the restive vanity of the *parvenus* on the one hand, or that of her old friends on the other.

At the age of thirty-eight she still retained a fragile and aristocratic beauty peculiarly her own—clear-cut, delicate features, and a supple figure. When she spoke, her pale face seemed to light up, and to glow with animation. Her large black eyes were full of kindness, but their steadiness indicated that the vital principle within her drew its sustenance from a source external to herself. Married in the bloom of youth, to an old and jealous soldier, it was doubtless to the falseness of her position in the midst of a gay Court that she owed an air of melancholy, replacing an expression once bright with the “purple light of love.”

All her affections were concentrated in a single sentiment—that of motherhood. That happiness which her married life had denied her she had found in the extreme love which she bore her only son. She was miserable and anxious when he was away from her, and lived only in and for her son. Besides being her only child, he was her last surviving relative, the single being in whom all her hopes and fears were centred. The late Comte de Dey, her husband, was the last scion of his family, as she herself was the last representative of hers; so that, in the case of the Countess worldly interests and worldly calculations had combined with the noblest needs of the heart to heighten the sentiment so deeply rooted in the breast of every woman. It was with difficulty that she had reared her boy. Twenty times had the doctors given him up, but she had reaped the inexpressible joy of beholding him surmount the perils of childhood, in defiance of the gloomy predictions of the Faculty. He developed into such a charming young man, that at the age of twenty he was reckoned one of the most accomplished “cavaliers” of Versailles. By a stroke of good fortune, which does not fall to the lot of every affectionate mother, Madame de Dey was idolized by her son. They were knit together by mutual sympathy.

Having received a commission as sub-lieutenant of dragoons at the age of eighteen, the young Count had obeyed the point of honour, and shared the exile of the emigrant princes of the House of Bourbon.

Madame de Dey, noble, wealthy, and the mother of an “emigrant,” was fully alive to all the dangers of her situation. Restricting her aspirations to the preservation of the large fortune which she hoped to transmit to her son, she had renounced the pleasure of accom-

panying him ; and when she read the stringent laws whereby the Republic daily confiscated the estates of this and that "emigrant" in the neighbourhood of Carentan, she saw reason to congratulate herself on her self-denial. Then, on learning the terrible series of executions carried out by order of the Convention, she slept in peace on the reflection that her only real treasure was in safety, and far from the hungry scaffold.

Meanwhile she had come to Carentan with a full conviction of the difficulties which there awaited her. But a mother's courage sustained her. She opened her doors to the procurator of the commune, to the mayor, to the president of the district, to the public prosecutor, and even to the judges of the Revolutionary Tribunal. Of these persons, the four first-mentioned, who were unmarried, hoped to gain her hand. The public prosecutor, who had once practised as a solicitor at Caen, and had often acted on behalf of Madame de Dey, distinguished himself from her other suitors by devotion and generosity—a formidable ruse, which rendered him by far the most dangerous of the four rivals. Moreover, he was the only one who knew the exact depth of the Countess's purse. Doubtless, therefore, his love was fortified by avarice, which, in its turn, was backed by his immense local influence, which included the power of life and death throughout the district.

The Countess employed the inventive spirit with which Nature had endowed her, in playing off these rivals one against another ; hoping that by gaining time she would pass safely through all troubles. Hitherto she had cleverly managed to preserve her independence, but through an inexplicable piece of imprudence she took it into her head to deny herself to her habitual guests. The interest with which she had inspired them was so genuine, that those who presented themselves only to be refused admission felt the liveliest alarm. Then, with the frank curiosity of provincials, they began to pester old Bridget, the Countess's housekeeper, with questions as to the nature of the trouble or illness which had overtaken her mistress. Bridget's only reply was that the Countess had shut herself up in her room and refused to admit any one—even her own servants. Now one well-known effect of the almost cloistral existence led by the inhabitants of a small French town is, that they contract an invincible habit of analysing the actions of their neighbours ; and after having bestowed a good deal of pity upon Madame de Dey, without in the least knowing whether or no it were called for, her excluded guests betook themselves to ferreting out the cause of her sudden seclusion.

"If she were ill," quoth the first speaker, "she would have sent for the doctor ; but the doctor has been at my house all day playing



chess. And, by the way, he said to me jokingly that in these times there is but one disease—and that is incurable.”

Everybody surmised that there was a secret in the matter. On the morrow suspicion deepened. Bridget had been seen in the market-square early in the morning, and—wonderful to relate!—she had bought the only hare there was for sale. Now all the town knew that Madame de Dey positively disliked game of any kind. The poor hare formed the basis of innumerable theories. As the day wore on, there was a stir and a bustle in the Countess's household. The footman was seen beating a carpet in the garden. Had this happened the day before, no one would have bestowed a thought upon the matter; but now this carpet became a substantial piece of evidence in support of the romances which every brain in Carentan was busily engaged in weaving. When, on the beginning of the second day, Madame de Dey gave out that she was unwell, all the leaders of Carentan society congregated at the house of the mayor's brother. Every one came with his theory. The public prosecutor concocted a whole drama, the catastrophe of which was a midnight visit of the Comte de Dey to his mother's dwelling. The mayor's belief was that a non-juring priest had come post-haste from La Vendée to demand shelter; but the purchase of the hare on Friday—a fast-day—troubled him not a little, as being in direct conflict with this hypothesis. The president of the district also believed in a fugitive; but his fugitive was a Chouan or Vendean chieftain hotly pursued by the emissaries of the Republic. Another theory which found several supporters was that the Countess's visitor was a nobleman escaped from some Parisian gaol; but all agreed in believing that she had been guilty of one of those acts of generosity which the law then branded as crimes, and which were frequently expiated on the scaffold. Whereupon the public prosecutor kept repeating in an audible whisper that they must all hold their tongues, and try to save the unfortunate creature from the dreadful fate which she was only too plainly courting.

“If you will talk, and the affair gets noised abroad,” he added, “I shall have no choice but to intervene, to search her house, and then——” He left the sentence unfinished, but the conclusion was one which every one could supply for himself.

## PART II.

THE Countess's well-wishers took the matter so much to heart, that on the morning of the third day the procureur-syndic of the commune got his wife to write her a letter, begging her to receive her friends in

the evening as usual. Meanwhile, the old merchant at whose house the friends had met in solemn conclave on the previous evening, made bold to call upon Madame de Dey in person. Relying upon the good turn which he had in mind to do her, he insisted on being admitted to her presence. Great was his astonishment on finding her in the garden, engaged in picking the few flowers which still lingered in the borders, to make a bouquet for her vases.

"Beyond a doubt the man whom she is harbouring must be her lover," soliloquized the old man. Deeply touched by the proof of affection afforded by her occupation—for the whole male sex feels flattered at any proof, on the part of a woman, of devoted affection for one of its members—the old merchant told the Countess of the reports current in the town, and warned her of the danger to which she was exposed. "For," said he in conclusion, "although some of us might be quite ready to forgive an act of heroism in favour of a priest, there will be no one to take pity on you, should they discover that you are sacrificing yourself on the altar of love."

At these words Madame de Dey cast at the old man a mad and bewildered look.

"Come with me," she said, taking him by the hand and leading him into her boudoir, where she drew from her bosom a soiled and crumpled note, and, though her voice almost failed her, bade him "Read." Then, overcome by her emotions, she sank into an arm-chair.

While the old merchant was fumbling for his spectacles, and cleaning them when found, the Countess carefully scanned his face for the first time since his arrival. At length she said to him, in a voice smothered with emotion, "I am sure you will not betray me!"

"Have I not already made myself the accomplice of your crime?" replied the old man unaffectedly.

The Countess felt a secret thrill, as, for the first time since she had taken up her abode in that little town, she found that it contained a soul to sympathise with her. On reading the letter, the old merchant at once comprehended both her depression and her joy. Her son, it seemed, had taken part in the celebrated Granville expedition; and being captured and thrown into prison, had sent his mother a letter which inspired her with a sweet, sad hope. Confident of being able to make his escape, he had named three days, on any one of which she might expect him in disguise. The letter concluded with a passionate farewell, to meet the event of his non-appearance by the evening of the third day. As the old man restored it to Madame de Dey, his hand trembled visibly.

"And this is the third day!" she exclaimed, starting from her seat and pacing up and down the apartment.

"You have acted imprudently in some respects," said her companion. "Why send out for provisions?"

"He might have arrived fainting with hunger and fatigue."

"I can rely upon my brother," continued the old man; "and I will go at once, and get him to make common cause with you."

After having arranged with Madame de Dey how they should comport themselves during the evening, the old man devised a series of pretexts for calling at the houses of the principal personages in Carentan, where he announced that Madame de Dey, whom he had just seen, would "receive" that evening, notwithstanding her indisposition. Naturally he was subjected to a kind of cross-examination by every family he visited. But he proved himself more than a match for the wily Norman wits. His first call, indeed, resulted in a perfect triumph for him. The mistress of the house was an old lady terribly tormented with the gout. Into her sympathetic ears he poured the following tale:—Madame de Dey had been seized with an attack of gout in the stomach, which threatened to prove fatal. Suddenly she remembered that the famous physician Dr. Tronchin had once advised her, when she was suffering from a similar attack, to cover the chest with the skin of a hare flayed alive, and to keep to her bed without stirring hand or foot. Having strictly followed this queer prescription, Madame de Dey, who two days previously had been at death's door, now felt well enough to welcome all who should choose to pay her a visit. The success of this "tarra-diddle," which flew from mouth to mouth, was prodigious; and the physician of Carentan, who was a royalist *in petto*, heightened its effect by solemnly discussing the merits of the specific. And Madame de Dey's habitual guests hurried to her house that evening more eagerly and earlier than usual. They found her seated at the corner of the large fireplace in her drawing-room—which was almost as simply furnished as all the other apartments of the same class in Carentan; for, in order to avoid offending the narrow prejudices of her guests, she had renounced the luxury to which she had formerly been accustomed, and had left the house exactly as it was when she first became its mistress. But, well knowing that her guests would readily forgive any extravagance of which she might be guilty for their exclusive gratification, she spared no expense in catering for their creature-comforts, and she gave them excellent dinners.

Thus then, at about seven o'clock in the evening, the best "indifferent society" in Carentan was gathered together in a large semicircle around her hearth. The mistress of the house, supported under her terrible anxiety by the compassionate glances of the old merchant, endured the minute questionings and frivolous arguments of her guests with amazing courage. But whenever she heard the



sound of the door-knocker, or of approaching feet on the resounding pavement of the street, she sought to hide her emotion by starting some question of absorbing interest to those who had a pecuniary stake in the welfare of the province. Nevertheless, there were two persons—the public prosecutor and one of the judges of the Revolutionary Tribunal—who sat silent while the rest were talking, closely watched the slightest movements of her face, and kept their ears open to the least sounds which proceeded from the other quarters of the house. From time to time, moreover, these two men would ask the Countess an awkward question, to which, however, she always replied with admirable presence of mind. Mothers are so brave! Presently came the time for card-playing. Then Madame de Dey arranged the various parties of whist, boston and vingt-et-un; after which she entered into conversation with a group of young ladies, winding up by inducing them to ask her to let them have a game of loto, whereupon she hurried out of the room, on the pretext that no one but herself knew where to find the cards.

“My dear Bridget, I am suffocating,” she exclaimed, wiping the tears from her eyes, bright with the fever of hope deferred. “He comes not,” she continued, glancing round the bedroom to which she had mounted on making her escape from the drawing-room. “Here, however, I can breathe and live. A few moments more, and he will be here. For he is alive; I know he is alive—my heart tells me so. Don’t you hear something, Bridget? Oh! I would give the remainder of my days only to know whether he is still in prison or making his way across country. How I wish I could cease to think!”

Again she cast her eyes around her, to see if all was in order. A cheerful fire was blazing on the hearth; the shutters were closed, and the furniture shone again with the polishing it had undergone. The mere look of the bed was enough to show that the Countess had aided Bridget in its arrangement; the mother’s hopes betrayed themselves in the delicate care which had been bestowed upon it. Indeed, who but a mother could have anticipated a weary soldier’s every want, and so abundantly provided for their satisfaction? The choice meal ready laid out, the slippers warming at the fire, the clean linen airing before it—everything that her son could possibly require was there awaiting his arrival.

“Ah, Madame, he will come; and he’s not far off even now. I’m sure he is alive and on his way,” replied Bridget. “I put a key in my Bible, and held it on my fingers while Cottin read the Gospel of St. John; and, Madame, the key never so much as turned.”

“And is that a certain sign?” asked the Countess.

“Oh, Madame, that’s known to all the world for a sure sign! I’d

pledge my soul that he's still alive. Yet, in spite of the dangers which await him in this place, how I should rejoice to see him here. Poor Monsieur Auguste! No doubt he is plodding his way here on foot at this very moment," cried Bridget.

"There—there—the church clock is striking eight!" exclaimed Madame de Dey, terrified at the thought that she had stayed longer than she ought in this room where everything tended to favour the conviction that her son still lived. Yet, in spite of her anxiety to rejoin her guests, she could not resist the temptation to linger for a moment beneath the peristyle of the staircase, and strain her ears in the effort to assure herself that no hubbub was waking the sleeping echoes of the town. She cast a passing smile at Bridget's husband, who was playing the part of sentinel, and whose eyes seemed dazed by listening with all his might for any sound that might be wafted from the market-place through the still night air. But look which way she would, the image of her boy was everywhere before her. A moment later she re-entered the drawing-room, with a well-affected air of gaiety, and sat down to a game of *loto* with a bevy of young girls; though now and again her feelings proved too strong for her, and she deserted the chattering party for her chair in the chimney-corner, on the plea that she felt unwell.

Such was the state of affairs in the abode of Madame de Dey, while a young man clad in a brown *carmagnole*—the obligatory costume of the period—was faring onwards towards Carentan along the high-road from Paris to Cherbourg. At the time of the first conscriptions discipline was but little observed, and it was a common sight to see the roads thronged with conscripts wearing their ordinary dress. The traveller with whom we are now concerned was considerably ahead of the column of conscripts whose destination was Cherbourg, and whose arrival the Mayor of Carentan was hourly expecting, with the view of despatching them to their respective billets. Our conscript was marching heavily, but still stoutly; and his bearing seemed to indicate that he had long been familiar with the rough life of a soldier. He bore upon his back an almost empty knapsack, and in his hand a boxwood stick. A few minutes after he had caught sight of the towers of Carentan, then fantastically irradiated by the silvery moonbeams, the solitary traveller entered the town, waking the echoes of its silent and deserted streets with his heavy tread. The conscript very soon found himself under the shelter of the porch attached to the dwelling of Carentan's chief magistrate, and sat down upon a stone bench to wait until it should please that worthy to comply with his request to be furnished with the ticket entitling him to claim a night's lodging in his allotted quarters. He had not waited long when the Mayor sent for him.

The foot-soldier was a youth of prepossessing appearance, who seemed to belong to a family of distinction.

"What is your name?" asked the Mayor, surveying the recruit with a very penetrating look.

"Julien Jussieu," replied the conscript.

"And you come from?——" continued the magistrate with a smile of incredulity.

"From Paris."

"I fancy your comrades must be far enough away," rejoined the Mayor derisively.

"I am nine miles ahead of the battalion."

"No doubt, Carentan has some special attraction for you, citizen conscript," said the Mayor, with another knowing look. "But no matter; we know where to send you. There," he added, holding out a ticket, "off with you, *citizen Jussieu!*"

There was an unmistakable touch of irony in the tone in which the magistrate pronounced these last two words, as he presented the conscript with a ticket bearing the address of Madame de Dey, which the young man read with undisguised curiosity.

"He knows well enough that he has not far to go, and when he once gets outside it won't take him long to cross the market-place, I warrant," said the Mayor to himself as the youth was leaving the house. "He's got plenty of pluck! And may God protect him! He's an answer for everything! Aye! aye! but if some one else had been in my place and asked to look at his papers, it would have been all up with him!"

By this time the clocks of Carentan were chiming half-past nine; lanterns were being lighted in Madame de Dey's ante-room, ready for her departing guests, who, with the help of their servants were donning their clogs, their overcoats, and mantles. The card-players had settled their accounts, and were on the point of retiring in a body, according to the established custom which obtains in every small provincial town.

"It seems as if the public prosecutor means to stay," quoth a lady, observing that that important functionary was not among their number, when they were on the point of separating in the market-square.

The lady was right. The dread magistrate to whom she referred was alone with his hostess, who was tremblingly awaiting the moment when it should be his good pleasure to depart.

"Citizeness," he began after a long silence, which in itself was sufficiently terrifying, "I am here to see that the laws of the Republic are carried into effect."

Madame de Dey shuddered.



"Have you no confession to make to me?" he enquired.

"None whatever," she replied, in utter amazement.

"Ah! madame," he exclaimed, sitting down beside her and adopting a different tone, "in default of a single word from you at this moment, it may be your fate or mine to die upon the scaffold. I have been too close an observer of your character, mind and manners, to be the dupe of the artifice which you have put upon your other guests to-night. To me it is as clear as daylight that you are expecting your son."

The Countess met this assertion with a gesture of denial; but meanwhile she had turned pale, the muscles of her face had contracted under the effort she made to assume an appearance of tranquillity; and not one of her movements had escaped the pitiless eye of the public prosecutor.

"Well, be it so; receive him," continued the functionary of the Revolution. "But let him not remain a moment later than seven o'clock beneath your roof. To-morrow, at break of day, I shall come here, armed with a warrant of arrest which I shall have made out."

The look of utter stupefaction with which Madame de Dey regarded him was enough to tame the heart of a tiger.

"I shall then clearly establish the baselessness of the accusation against you, by instituting the strictest search," continued the public prosecutor, "and the nature of my report will be such as to shield you from all further suspicion. I shall dwell upon your patriotic donations and your 'civism,' and we shall both of us be saved."

At this instant the sound of a knock at the front door made the old house ring again.

"Ah!" cried the terror-stricken mother, sinking to her knees, "He must be saved! He must be saved!"

"Yes, let us save him, even at the peril of our lives!" exclaimed the public prosecutor, with a world of passion in his voice and eyes.

"I am entirely in his power," murmured Madame de Dey, as the public prosecutor courteously helped her to rise from her knees.

"Not so, madame," he replied with an oratorical gesture. "Far be it from me to extort from your fears the boon which your heart denies."

"Madame," cried Bridget, bursting into the room. "Here he——"

Fancying that her mistress was alone, the old servant had rushed in, flushed with joyous excitement; but at sight of the public prosecutor, every trace of colour forsook her cheeks, and she stood there as if turned to stone.

"Who is it, Bridget?" asked the public prosecutor gently and intelligently.

"A conscript that the Mayor has billeted on us," replied the servant exhibiting the ticket.

"Ah! true," exclaimed the functionary, reading the ticket. "We are expecting a whole battalion to-night;" and with that he took his leave.

As soon as he was gone the Countess almost flew upstairs, though her legs felt as if they would give way at every step. She opened the bedroom door, beheld her son, and threw herself into his arms, more dead than alive; sobbing convulsively, covering his face with kisses, and ejaculating between her sobs, "My son! my son!"

"Madame!" exclaimed the stranger.

"Oh! it is not he, it is not he!" cried the poor mother, recoiling in terror, and eyeing the conscript with a wild and haggard gaze.

"In God's holy name—but what a likeness!" exclaimed Bridget.

Then came a brief pause, during which not even the conscript—entire stranger though he was—could look at Madame de Dey without a pang.

"Ah! sir," she at length exclaimed, leaning for support on Bridget's husband, and now for the first time fully conscious of the agony whose first attack had well-nigh killed her; "Ah! sir, I can endure the sight of you no longer. Suffer my servants to take my place and attend to your wants."

So saying the poor woman crawled rather than walked out of the room and downstairs to her own apartment, supported by Bridget and Bridget's husband.

"Why, madame," cried the old housekeeper, as she placed her mistress in a chair, "is this man to sleep in poor Monsieur Auguste's bed, to wear Monsieur Auguste's slippers, and to eat the pâté that I made expressly for Monsieur Auguste? No, if I were to be guillotined for it, I——"

"Bridget, Bridget," moaned Madame de Dey.

"Hold your tongue, you chatterbox," whispered Bridget's husband, "unless you want to kill your mistress."

At this moment the noise made by the conscript in seating himself at table reached the room to which Madame de Dey and her servants had retired.

"I cannot stay here," she exclaimed. "I will go into the greenhouse. There I shall be better able to hear what goes on in the town during the night."

Her mind was still in a state of suspense, between the fear that her son was lost to her for ever, and the hope that she might yet look upon his face again. Awful was the silence of the long, long night; but it was broken once, and broken in a manner more harrowing to the feelings of the unhappy Countess than the dread silence

which it superseded. This was when the battalion of recruits marched into the town, and dispersed in all directions to seek their allotted quarters. Not a footstep, not a single noise of any sort, escaped the poor lady's ear; and every sound was big with a hope born only to be defeated. And then again a deathlike stillness settled down upon the sleeping city. Towards daybreak the weary watcher was forced to return to her apartment. When Bridget, who had kept a watchful eye upon all her mistress's movements, alarmed at finding that she did not reappear, entered the bedroom, she saw her stretched upon a couch, stone dead.

"Poor lady!" cried the old housekeeper. "She must have heard that conscript dressing himself, and tramping up and down dear Monsieur Auguste's room, singing that cursed *Marseillaise* of theirs, and that must have given her her deathblow."

But Bridget was in error. The death of her mistress was due to a more deep-seated feeling—doubtless to some terrible vision. For at the very time when the mother died at Carentan the son was shot in Le Morbihan. This tragical coincidence adds yet another instance to the stock of cases that go to prove the existence of secret sympathies which defy the laws of Space.



## On Christmas Eve.

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THE little village of San Martino lay far from any large town, out of the way of railroads, unvisited by strangers, and in its simple poverty untroubled generally by the burning political questions which have during the long national struggle convulsed poor Italy.

Now and then there was grievous tribulation, when the young men were drawn by the conscription and carried off for many years, or perhaps for ever, into the unknown world, that lay beyond the chestnut-clad hills of San Martino: now and then one of them would come back for awhile on leave, having altered so much that his very parents looked on him with a mixture of admiration and dismay, and shuddered and crossed themselves when he spoke of a state of things, which seemed to them evil and blasphemous beyond measure, in the great world.

The people kept their quiet habits and their old traditions, and they went on feeding their children on the chestnut bread, though they knew well the consequence—that out of every baby family, at least half were sent to join the little band of the holy innocents in Heaven. It is the will of Heaven, they said, and sought no remedy.

The crowning glory of San Martino was the convent. It stood half-way up the hill, with the chestnut-trees all round it, a large grey building with its church adjoining, and a cloister which was exquisitely lovely enough to have attracted sight-seers from far and wide, had its existence been better known.

In old days the Convent of the Santissima Annunziata had been founded and held by a very rich community, and the buildings were very large, and the revenues were great; and the convent chapel possessed a rich treasure of golden and silver reliquaries, splendid vestments and altar vessels, adorned with precious stones and rare enamels. The village belonged to the convent, and the Mother-Superior herself issued orders to all her *contadini*, who cultivated the land in the valleys round.

But of late the riches of the convent had vanished—only about twenty sisters lived there, and the Mother-Superior had not even appointed a chaplain, but had accepted the services of the village Priore; the consequence being that the little village church was temporarily closed, and the large convent chapel was thrown open to the village public, and the nuns occupied the gallery at the west



end, seated behind an ancient grating of old wrought iron, the delicate leafage and scroll-work of which were touched here and there with gold.

Behind this grating the sisters assembled in their creamy white robes, and led the singing. There was one voice among them of such extraordinary power and richness of sound that it seemed to echo and ring through the church—and the worshippers would turn and gaze at the closed-in gallery, and wonder from which of the still, veiled figures, all apparently exactly alike, came the glorious melody. Had they seen within, they might have wondered still more. Sister Assunta could sing—she had the face and the voice of a St. Cecilia; but she could do nothing else. She was not wise, she was not clever—for years they had tried to teach her slow fingers to play the organ, she could not learn; delicate embroidery in her hands was hopelessly tangled and spoiled; she could not even teach the little orphans in the sisters' school to do anything—her eyes were always far away and dreamy. The Mother-Superior used to tell how she had been brought to the convent years ago when a child of ten years old, and that then she seemed so dazed and bewildered that they said it would be cruel to arouse her slumbering mind; the shadow of some terrible horror, something that she had heard or seen, had fallen on the brightness of her intellect and quenched its light.

But she could sing: it was long before she could learn the glorious old Latin hymns that sounded so nobly from her lips; but when she had once mastered the words she never forgot them, but would sit with her hands in her lap, her face raised, and her eyes gazing outwards unseeingly, and the sound of her voice grandly ringing through the building or thrilling higher and higher, ending with a sound so full and sweet and heavenly that long after it had ceased the air seemed to vibrate with its music.

And for that wonderful gift of song all the sisters loved Assunta, and treated her with a peculiar, gentle tenderness almost reverence.

The Mother said to the Priore one day, "It seems to us indeed sometimes that when the spirit of the real, lonely miserable child was quenched, that St. Cecilia took her under her own especial protection and gave her that look in her eyes and that tone in her voice."

But as the years passed by, and the tide of the nineteenth century washed over Italy, the waters of the new era rushed even into the far-distant sleeping valleys, and one day a terrible thunderbolt fell on the Santissima Annunziata.

The Mother-Superior was summoned to appear before the Prefect of the district, and found him in presence of the Mayor, of a strange officer whom she had never seen before, and of the Priore himself.

The Mother-Superior was a woman of keen sense and shrewd clever-

ness; by intuition she knew more of the ways of the world than would really seem possible. She had long expected the crisis that came on her that day, but the blow was none the less terrible when it fell.

The Prefect announced to her that by order of the Government the convent would be closed within one week; that by order of the Government the sisters were to disband, were to resume a secular dress, and to disperse to their homes; and he further began to declare them freed from their vows, absolved from all obligation to continue in their order, and——

But the Mother stopped him with a gesture so dignified that he felt as if to proceed would be to offer an insult to a dethroned queen.

He bowed and folded up the paper from which he had been reading.

"Madame doubtless fully understands without my forcing on her the pain of being more explicit," he said. "The Government, in consideration of the helplessness of its subjects thus thrown homeless upon the world——"

Here the Mother could not avoid throwing a look of anguish on the Priore. The Prefect cleared his throat and went on: "The Government undertakes to give a pension of one franc daily to each nun for the rest of the term of her natural life, and until she marries, or——"

"Hold!" said the Mother. "You have said quite enough—one franc a day; and our revenues—the revenues of the convent that we have held for past generations as God's stewards for His poor?"

"They become the affair of the Government," said the Prefect with a bow.

The Mother-Superior stood still for one moment; no one dared to interrupt her. She stood before the three men, her hands meekly hidden in the broad sleeves of her white habit; her face full of a concentrated power and dignity which awed them involuntarily. The old Priore could not face the blow she had received as she did herself; his hands trembled, and the tears rolled down his cheeks.

When she spoke again it was with infinite quietness. "How long do these gentlemen say that the Government give us?"

"One week before the place is completely given up; but, madame," said the Prefect, clearing his throat, "much as I regret it, I must make one request. My friend here is a colonel of the regiment that is to be quartered for a time at San Martino."

The Superior bowed gravely to the officer thus introduced to her notice.

The Prefect again coughed—it was difficult to heap blow after blow upon this helpless, dignified woman. "The convent unfortu-

nately is the only building large enough or suitable for a barracks, and consequently——”

The Mother-Superior gave one little gasp. She stretched out her hand and caught hold of the table. “I suppose this desecration is inevitable?” she said.

“Quite inevitable,” said the Prefect, going on hastily. “And so also is the request I am obliged to make to you. This gentleman, Colonel Montanelli, has to return to Florence to-morrow to make arrangements for the transfer of his troops to San Martino by the end of the week, consequently he requests permission to see the whole convent now, this evening, with a view to ascertaining what the accommodation is.”

Montanelli, a staid, soldierly-looking man, with an immense monstache, unfolded his official orders, and laid them before her.

“This is very sudden, gentlemen,” said the Superior, with an effort to conceal what a shock it was; “but I must obey. Listen,” she said suddenly. “If I had not heard from others of the utter futility of opposition, you should only desecrate our holy convent by walking over my dead body. I would resist to the last.”

“You are wise to make no opposition, madame,” said the Prefect shortly, and the Priore made a deprecatory movement of his hand.

“I have one request to make,” said the Superior. They all bowed.

“This evening will you attend our Benediction service, and when it is over, I will myself conduct this gentleman all over the convent, provided that my sisters remain in their places in the gallery until once more their privacy is insured?”

“Believe me, madame,” said Montanelli, “it would be wise to accustom them a little to their liberty, before the doors of the cage are thrown open permanently.”

“I am accustomed to rule my community, as monsieur is accustomed to rule his company,” said the Mother.

The Prefect and Montanelli spoke apart for a moment with the Mayor; they were all anxious to cause as little scandal as possible—the villagers adored the Sisters. Colonel Montanelli came forward.

“Everything shall be done exactly as it suits you best, madame,” he said. “I and my lieutenant will be present at the Benediction, and when it is over we will place ourselves at your disposal.”

The Mother-Superior withdrew, and not till she was safe once more within the convent walls did she give way to the agony of her soul. Soldiers! Soldiers to take possession of their sacred home, to riot in their consecrated cells, to drink in their refectory, to clatter along the still cloister! She looked round her with a kind of passion of mingled fear and despair. It required great courage to break the news to the sisterhood, and to bear their terror and despair. What

was to become of them? Where should they go? Some of them had homes; some were old and knew not where to turn; each individual case would have to be considered.

With a trembling hand the Mother-Superior chose the hymns for the Benediction: a vague idea was in her mind that she would like the hearts of the soldiers touched, as they must be if they were human. She told the sisters so, and with a kind of absolute trust in her, they determined to sing their very best. The Mother-Superior gave the book into Assunta's hand, and looked at her; her face was the same as usual, the story had conveyed no idea to her mind whatever—she did not understand it.

The hour came. The little church was crowded, as it always was for Benediction, and in the foremost places of honour, beside the Prefect and the Mayor, sat Colonel Montanelli and his young lieutenant, conspicuous by their uniforms and glancing epaulettes.

The service began, presently the hymn began from the gallery behind. The three strangers started. It was the "*Pange, lingua, gloriosi*" that Assunta sang, and her voice beginning softly rolled on in a glorious volume of sound, the last part of each verse sung in chorus by all the sisters. It died away, and there was a pause, while everyone knelt; then the same voice began to sing again,—a very St. Cecilia—and this time she began the evening hymn very softly, "*Te lucis ante terminum.*" And hardly had she finished than all together they sung the "*Nunc Dimittis.*"

Everyone rose from their knees thinking that all was over, when suddenly once more Assunta's voice burst upon them; she sang powerfully, the grand notes ringing on the ear,

*"Gloria Patri, gloria Filio, gloria Spiritui Sancto,  
Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper."*

Her voice gathered strength, and the last words rolled on a tide of sound none there had ever heard equalled—

*"Et in saecula saeculorum."*

The whole congregation with a strange excitement and strong emotion joined in the last Amen.

The Mother-Superior rose from her knees, wiped away the hot tears that had rushed into her eyes, and went down from the gallery into the convent, shutting the door of the private staircase into the hall as she did so.

She found the officers waiting for her, in an enthusiasm of admiration for what they had heard.

"What is she like, madame, this sister with the wonderful voice?" asked Montanelli. "I never heard its like, not on the finest stage in Europe!"



"She would not interest you," said the Mother, alarmed at the notice her poor innocent child had excited. She led the way resolutely, but her heart ached and bled—she could hardly bear to take these men into their little cells, and to think of what was coming. But they were very quiet, very respectful to her, and when they had seen all, they thanked her very civilly, they returned to the passage into which the private staircase came, and both men were looking up it so earnestly that a sudden resolution came into the head of the Mother-Superior. She begged them to wait, and went up with her quick but dignified step, and summoned the sisterhood to come down.

They came down, walking two and two, passed the spectators, and went their way. As they passed, the Mother touched Montanelli's arm. "Behold our songstress," she said, and with a little movement of her head she indicated Sister Caterina—a very stout and homely woman who had long been afflicted with the gout.

"*Per Bacco!*" ejaculated the two officers, and they took their leave with many bows and thanks.

The Mother-Superior sighed and shook her head. "For this little lie Heaven will forgive me," she said.

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*

It was a terrible evening that passed in the convent: the sisters took their misfortune in so many ways. Sister Caterina moaned and beat her breast; Sister Monica looked fierce and said harsh and bitter words; Sister Giovanna knelt and sobbed, and thought that God had withdrawn all help and protection from them. But Sister Elizabetta asked strange childish questions about the world, and her eyes lighted with a furtive pleasure, and the Mother-Superior felt that perhaps she most of all needed her prayers.

And the days that followed were full of strange and heart-breaking novelties. Perhaps the donning of secular clothing was the worst to bear—what they wore seemed suddenly to assume such a vast, out-of-proportion importance to them all; and as each sister crept out of her cell, they dreaded to meet each other's eyes, they felt so strange, so unnatural. The elders were in passionate tears, some of the younger ones unable to abstain from tearful giggling.

The Mother belonged to a rich family; they had willingly sent the necessary clothes, and some money to help each sister to go back. But alas! how odd, how forlorn, how terribly wide looked the outer world on the last morning they were to spend together.

They were all assembled for the last time to hear Mass together, and as they came out of the church the people crowded round them kissing their hands, sobbing, weeping, crying that the blessing of God was leaving San Martino.

The Mother-Superior was taking Assunta with her: she could not send her out alone. Assunta knew nothing, save that when they took off her white habit, she moaned and looked scared and frightened, and she would not part with it—she clung to it, and carried it with her in a little parcel. She and the Mother entered the diligence together, they looked back to give one parting look to the weeping crowd, to the sorrowful face of the old Priore, and they saw the convent gates wide, wide open, even the cloister door open to any who chose to enter, and the Mother threw herself back in her seat and hid her face—it seemed more than she could bear.

"Mother," said Assunta presently. "Mother, what are soldiers?"

The Mother-Superior looked at Assunta. It could not be only fancy—had the shock of the last few days increased yet more the mist which surrounded her? Oh, if she could but defend and save her from and in the world!

"Soldiers are men whom you must always fly and avoid, my child," said the Mother. "They are trained and exist to fight each other. You must never speak to them."

"Would they hurt me, Mother?"

"God will defend His own, my child."

"I am so cold."

It was very cold; the bitter *bise* blew in through the diligence and froze their blood. Some driving showers of hail fell; they were worn out with sorrow and cold and exhaustion before they reached the inn where they were to sleep that night."

They slept together. The Mother was awakened by Assunta moaning.

"What is it, child?"

"I cannot find my cross, my wooden cross, Mother."

"You have taken it off with our convent habit. Go to sleep—go to sleep, and forget."

But the moaning woke her again.

"I cannot find my rosary, Mother, and I have no veil."

"Patience Assunta, it is the will of God."

"But God will not know me. He will not know who it is without my dress. What shall I do? He will not know that it is Assunta."

"God will know, child, and the Guardian Angel is with thee. Go to sleep."

The Mother was worn out and slept at last heavily. And late in the morning when she awoke Assunta was not by her side. She started up and dressed in sickening anxiety. No one had seen or missed her. Where was she? What had become of her?

The world lay under a fall of snow; it was very cold. The Mother-

Superior hired a little carriage, having a strong idea in her mind that Assunta must have started on the road back to the Santissima Annunziata, and that she would soon overtake her. She confided her story to the kind ears of the *padrona* of the little inn, who promised to help in every way, and then she mounted her little carriage and drove slowly back all the way that she had come, looking out right and left, asking everyone that they passed whether they had seen a slender woman in black clothes with dreamy eyes, wandering along the road. But no one had seen or heard of Assunta. The Mother's heart died within her. What had then become of this most helpless child of all her most helpless little flock?

It was quite dark when she reached San Martino and the tired horses pulled up at the door of the Priore's house, a great cloud of steam rising from their smoking flanks in the bitter frosty air. The Priore was not within, he had been summoned late to a sick-bed, but his housekeeper kissed the cold hands of the careworn woman, in her long black shawl hardly recognising the Mother-Superior to whom she had looked up with such reverence.

The streets were all alive with noise, shouting and singing. Montanelli's regiment had taken up their quarters in the town. Half a dozen of the soldiers were now in the little cabaret, drinking and singing lustily. At ten o'clock the *rappel* marched through, and from every side the straggling soldiers fell in, and took their way to their new barracks.

"It is the will of God that I have come back," said the poor Mother. "It is His will that I should drink the cup of humiliation to the very dregs."

But where was Assunta? In the middle of the bitterly cold December night Assunta had risen from bed softly, gently, not to awaken the sleeping form of the Mother-Superior. She was lost, all lost, in this wide world—the one thought was ever in her mind. At the Santissima Annunziata was the gate of heaven; she must be there waiting in her white robes, or God would not know her, and the angels would pass her by.

The door of the inn was only on the latch. With her little bundle clasped in her arms Assunta glided out. It was cold, very very cold, but her hands and her brow were burning, and only one thought possessed her, to get back, back home again. She walked on through the day, and when any carriage or cart came along the road she hid herself behind a hedge or a tree—anywhere quite out of sight; carriages and carts were things of this world, and might intercept her on her rapid way to the gate of Heaven.

Then the dusk gathered round her—she was but half-way on her road; her feet were torn and bleeding. She could only go very slowly,

she was so unused to walking. She crept into a little dry ditch all full of the rustling brown dead leaves of the past, and she burrowed down in among them, and made the sign of the cross, and fell asleep with the stars shining down on her white upturned face. She was awakened by the bitter cold of the early dawn. She could hardly rise, for the sharp, agonising pains that shot through every limb as she slowly threw off their torpor. But she dragged herself on.

By-and-by the sun came out, and shed its warm rays over her, and Assunta spread out her arms, and let the warmth shine on her breast, and she toiled on. She passed a cottage where two little children sat on the door-step, eating their cakes of chestnut bread. She stopped and looked wistfully at them. One of them came forward timidly, and put his cake into her frozen hand. She ate it eagerly, ravenously; the child, half-frightened, ran indoors, and cried to his mother to come out. The kindly *contadina* came out, and reading the cold and hunger in Assunta's eyes, she brought her a big bowl of warm goat's milk.

"Drink and eat in the name of the Holy Mother of Jesus, poor child," she said.

When Assunta had finished she rose up, and put her hands together. "Shall I sing for you," she said gently.

"Yes, poor thing, if your songs are good, but not if they are the devil's songs, not fit for the children's ears."

Assunta looked at her wistfully. "I must hasten, hasten," she said. "God does not know me in this dress. It is evident, for even the eyes of those who are giving me alms in this house are blinded."

She began to sing,

"Jesu dulcis memoria,  
Dans vera cordis gaudia;"

and the sound was so lovely that the children thought it must be an angel singing, and the *contadina* sank on her knees. Before she had finished her hymn, she was going on her way singing still, till the exquisite music died away in the far distance; and those who were left behind, to their dying day believed that their visitor with the blue dreamy eyes gazing upwards was the blessed Cecilia herself.

Assunta was not far from San Martino now, but as the night closed in again, she lost her way, and wandered backwards and forwards. She slept again in the bitter night air, and in the morning she could not rise or shake off the snow till the sun had risen. By daylight she recognised where she was, in a little lane that led close up to the Santissima Annunziata, and she started to walk



home, when suddenly, to her horror, in the path before her she saw two soldiers, the sun glinting on their sword-belts.

These were the terrible ones who, since the Mother-Superior's words, had been the haunting terror of her life. She turned and fled again.

She crept in among the chestnut-trees, and lay hidden all day; a strange dreaminess had come over her, soothing every sense, and aching nerve; but when the twilight increased around her, she gathered up all her strength. She took off one by one the new evil clothes belonging to the world, and with stiff, aching arms she slowly donned her old dress. "Now the angels will know Assunta again," she said, and she pressed the wooden cross to her lips.

She waited till it was quite dark, and then she glided along, on, on, to the little rectory door, and into the convent. The refectory was quite silent and empty, but a strange, unaccountable thing—the door of the cloister was wide open, a thing altogether forbidden by the Mother. With her dress she resumed the old gentle, gliding gait, the hands joined modestly under her long sleeves, her head bowed down, shaded by the creamy white of her veil. Softly she crossed the cloister; it was dark, but the delicate tracery of each twisted column with the intricate foliage-work of its capital was just discernible. But Assunta started, there was another change—the door upstairs to the dormitories was also open. She went on.

Assunta's step was on the stair, when she paused in sudden fear, for a step was coming down from above, a sounding, ringing step such as she had never before heard, waking the echoes of the convent cloister. She stood at the feet of the stairs, one hand on her breast, the other raised affrightedly, and down straight in front of her appeared a soldier descending.

Assunta shrunk back with a little cry of anguish; she would have fled, but her limbs refused to move. She could only hold out her trembling hands with a mute appeal for mercy.

"*Maria Santissima*," cried the soldier, "one of the good sisters here! Do not be afraid, my sister; it is only I."

At the sound of his voice she ventured to look up. He was a very young soldier, beardless, with a round fresh face and brown eyes—surely he could not be so terrible as what she had imagined. He took her hand very respectfully and kissed it.

"I am come home to die," said Assunta very softly. "May I go up to my own cell? I will not disturb any one; only let me go."

The young soldier looked embarrassed. "But it is impossible," he said. "You cannot stay here, my sister. I will do what I can for you; but if the lieutenant or some of the others saw you, they might not respect you as I do; they do not love the sisters."

"Ah, then God has sent you to meet me! Let me go in."

"I can only do this for you, my sister. It is my duty to see to the mules. The stable is very dark, but the hay is warm; if you have no other home, in God's name sleep there to-night, and I will bring you food."

But Assunta now could hardly move or stand. In terror lest his work of mercy should be discovered, the young soldier half led, half carried, her back through the cloister and round to the convent stable. There was an empty stall—he threw down several trusses of hay under the manger and helped her to lie down.

"There, my sister," he said, "I will bring you some food—you are worn out. *Santi Apostoli*, but your hand is burning, yet you shrink with cold."

Assunta was murmuring to herself, "They will find me here! They will know me when they come. It is all right."

"Yes, it is all right," said the young soldier. "And you will not leave this place? It would be dangerous for you to go out; after all, the Holy Mother herself did not disdain a stable. Promise me you will not go."

"I will not," said Assunta.

He went out, closing the door behind him.

Assunta lay quite still on the hay. She could hear the slow movement of one of the mules in the stall next to her own; it put its brown patient head over the partition that divided them and looked down upon her. The moon streamed in through the lattice-window and lay brilliant and silvery on the floor; a reflection of shadowy leaves and ivy fell upon it: and it seemed as if the light and the shadow moved backwards and forwards.

In the silvery light Assunta saw a shadowy heavenly vision. It seemed as if there lay in the midst thereof a wondrously beautiful child—the brown mule moved restlessly and bent down its head with a strangely solemn look in its eyes—and there were shadowy wing-like movements in the air, visions vanishing before her eyes could distinguish them.

Assunta rose to her knees and knelt, and it seemed as if another knelt now in the moonlight, one with a marvellously beautiful face, with clasped hands and golden-haired head bowed in adoration.

Then Assunta heard a sound of music swelling round her, and she began to sing

"Adeste, fideles,  
 Laeti triumphantes,  
 Venite, venite in Bethlehem.  
 Natum videte Regem Angelorum,  
 Venite adoremus; venite adoremus; venite adoremus,  
 Dominum."

It was Christmas Eve. All the soldiers were in barracks, most of them asleep in their long dormitories when the clock struck twelve.

But some of them were awakened by a sound of distant music, and they woke each other and sat up in bed, their hair rising on their heads in terror, so strange, so marvellously beautiful was the sound.

"It is true what my mother used to tell us, there are then angels," said one, cowering under his bed-clothes, and beginning rapidly his long-forgotten prayers.

Colonel Montanelli alone recognised the sound, and he rose from the Mother-Superior's cell which he occupied, and hastily dressed himself and went in search of his lieutenant, whom he found sitting up in bed white with the eerie feeling that he was close to the unseen world.

"Fazio," he said, "it is the nun who sang so wonderfully."

"That is to say, it must be her spirit," said Fazio. "No human voice could sing like that."

Both men stood silent; it rose once more, that wonderful flood of sound:

*"Venite adoremus; venite adoremus; venite adoremus,  
Dominum."*

Then low, soft, like a sound sobbing itself away on the dying wind, came the deep "Amen," and all was silent, a silence so profound that Montanelli pushed the damp hand from his brow, and shook himself to throw off the cold, numbing chill of fear.

"This must be seen to," he said. "Get up, Fazio, we must take lanterns, and search out this mystery. I will have no ghosts in my barracks."

Fazio dressed himself quickly, even took down his sword and put it on as a kind of precaution.

The two men went out into the passages together; the quiet moonlight filled them with light. There was a sound of moving about and talking in the soldiers' quarters. At the far window of one stone passage a young soldier stood, fully dressed, looking out.

"Conti," said the colonel quickly, "who has been singing, and where is the singer?"

Conti saluted. "I can only conjecture, my Colonel," he said. "If I thought you would not blame me——"

"I will not blame you, or any one who will prove to the satisfaction of all, that the voice was a human voice, and the singer a living woman," said Montanelli.

Fazio behind him gave a sharp shiver. Was it cold, or superstitious fear?

"I can explain, my Colonel," said Conti, turning his young, fresh, ingenuous face towards his superior. "The voice came from the

stable; there is a poor, frightened, terrified refugee there. It is she who has been singing—but she is silent now,” he added, with a hushed, awe-stricken look. The dead silence seemed to throb, it was so still.

“*Per Bacco!*” said Montanelli. “I was right! It was the nun with the wonderful voice. But she must not stay there in the stable. I will not have it; it is a scandal. Your duty was to have sent her out,” he said to Conti sternly. The young soldier hung his head.

“She was, I thought, very ill, my Colonel,” he said, under his breath.

“Well, well, bring the key of the stable; we will at least put an end to this scandal at once. Light a lantern, Conti, and precede us.”

Conti dared not remonstrate. He did as he was told, and led the way to the stable.

They had to pass through the cloister; the moonlight made it almost as light as day.

At the door of the stable Conti turned round with a military salute, and ventured to say, “She is very ill, the poor sister, my Colonel.”

Then he obeyed a peremptory sign from his officer, and threw open the door.

The moonlight flooded in from window and open door, and centred in a wonderful halo of light round the stall. On the piled-up trusses of hay lay Assunta. She lay back, her arms crossed upon her breast, her long slender form perfectly straight and rigid, each thick fold of her habit composed and straight as if carved in marble, and on the white face was a look of peace unutterable, no smile; nothing but the awful calm, the absolute stillness of those who have entered upon their rest.

Over the low division the brown head of the mule looked down with soft, wondering eyes.

Young Conti knelt down, and burst into a passion of boyish tears. The two other men looked on with awe, the sound of the last Amen seemed to be vibrating in the air all round them.

Presently Montanelli laid his hand on the weeping lad’s shoulder.

“Conti,” he said, “lose no time, let the Priore know. Go at once. It is still night. Let him come without delay. For Heaven’s sake, no scandal!”

Conti rose to his feet. He stooped, and reverently kissed the hand of the dead Assunta, then he went out to obey his officer.

And half-an-hour later the Priore and the weeping Mother-Superior stood by the dead.

Over the dark night was stealing the pale blue dawn of Christmas Day.



## The Pavilion.

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LAPSE of time and the occurrence of certain events with which I need not trouble the reader, enable me to tell a very strange story, and I shall do so as nearly as possible in the words of the man who told it to me, and was the principal actor in it. But first I should like you to know what sort of a man he was, for in these cases credibility turns quite as much upon physiological as upon moral considerations. Scrooge knew this when he told Marley's ghost that he might be a piece of undigested potato, and many another wonder has been stamped upon a sympathetic brain by a disordered liver. This man, at the time when the events about to be narrated happened to him, was in perfect health. If any one possessed the *mens sana in corpore sano*, it was he. A Scotchman by birth, parentage and education, he was not given to romancing. By profession a lawyer, he had a mind trained to doubt, and capable of examining, all round, anything that was doubtful. Add to this that his nature was cold and rather cynical, and that his habits were strictly temperate, and I think it will be agreed that the chances of self-delusion, or of being tricked by others, were in his case reduced to a minimum.

In the year 1852, when just thirty years of age, and the junior partner in the famous law firm of which he shortly afterwards became the chief, he was sent to C——, to look up evidence in a heavy case depending upon proof of pedigree, and to watch the proceedings of the other side, which was suspected (and rightly, as the sequel shows) of being engaged there, not in looking up evidence, but in *making* it. He therefore assumed the name of McArdle, and looked out for some quiet lodging whence he could pursue his investigations unrecognised and unobserved. In the course of an hour's ramble about the outskirts of the city he found the very place. An old-fashioned house, with gabled roofs and black beams in its white walls, standing in an unpretentious but bright-looking garden, in which—and here the charm—was a semi-detached building, the sort of structure which in America would be called a pavilion, containing two large rooms. All the windows were closed, and on the door he observed the tattered remains of a

bill on which the letters LE and FUR were sufficiently visible to justify him in calling at the house and asking if its *dependance* were to be let furnished.

He could not obtain a decisive answer; it was—and it was not. The landlord had no use for it. He'd like to find a good tenant, and yet—— McArdle offered himself as possessing all the qualities of a good tenant. He would give very little trouble, have no visitors, and pay liberally in advance, but the “and yet——” was not recalled;—if he would return about that time next day, he should have a straight out “yes” or “no.”

When he went the following afternoon for his answer, he found all the doors and windows of the pavilion open, and several carpenters packing up their tools to leave (although it was only three o'clock), and grumbling. As he passed in, one of them accosted him and got as far as, “If you're the gentleman who's agoing to live here, you'd better——” when he was called off by a companion. “Come along, Bill,” he said; “it's no affair of ours.” McArdle gave little attention to this at the time, but he remembered it afterwards with a cold shiver. The landlord's answer was “yes,” but by no means the straight-out reply that had been promised. He (McArdle) could have the place if he wanted it. He had better take a good look round and see if it suited him. No one had lived there for a long time, and—well, he (the landlord) wouldn't ask any one to live there now, but he was a poor man and the promised rent was an object just then; and so if the gentleman had really taken such a fancy to the place, why, then he wouldn't say no, particularly as it was only for a month. The landlady was more encouraging. McArdle was not to mind what her “old man” said. He always made such a fuss about things. She would see that everything was made comfortable, and it would be all right “for sure.”

This pavilion was a long, low, one-storied building much older than the house, consisting of a wooden frame filled in with rubble, i.e., a composition of irregularly shaped stones and cement. Whatever might have been its original internal arrangements, it now was divided into two rooms and an entrance hall, out of which they opened right and left. The floors were of oak, which shone like glass, but some Vandal had whitewashed the wainscoting of a similar material, which extended almost up to the massive rafters of the ceiling. There was a charming view from the quaint oriel windows, and the landlady was as good as her word about comfort. The food was good, the attendance assiduous, and—above all—the quiet supreme. The work done by McArdle in this congenial retreat was remarkable at once for its caution and its vigour; but

it was hard and anxious work ; and his mind was completely filled with it.

He had been thus engaged for a fortnight when he came upon the track of an important discovery which, if verified, would establish his case beyond question. He was walking home—as was his custom—about five o'clock, with his mind full of it ; and became more and more irritated at what he thought was the rudeness of all other pedestrians. Never, he fancied, had so many people run against him, or got in his way. Now, it is a fact that the streets were unusually full, for it was market day ; still, the chances are that if he had given a little of his attention to where he was going, he would have got along without so much trouble ; but he was giving no attention to anything but his case—now blindly hurrying along to get at papers at home, now stopping short, as a doubt struck him, to consider whether he had not better go back whence he had come. He did not hear the angry inquiries as to where he was “going,” and who he was “a pushing of,” &c., &c. He did not realise that for the too frequent collisions he was himself to blame. He became irritated at the awkwardness of all other wayfarers, then angry as it began to dawn upon him that the pushings and obstructions were associated with one man—one man who, whether he were pushed from behind, or stopped from in front, or jostled from one side, was invariably to be seen walking on undisturbed about five paces ahead. “Of course,” McArdle admitted (and here I will take up his narrative), “it was most unreasonable in me to hold him in any way responsible for what was happening : but the idea got into my thoughts, and rankled. He walked along as though there was no one else in the street, and I was in collision every dozen yards !

“A woman knocked off my hat and then declared I had broken her parasol with it, and I was kept at least three minutes pacifying her. When my apology was accepted and I went on again, that man was in his usual place, five paces ahead. ‘Confound you !’ I said to myself. ‘I’ll get in front of you, and then we will see !’ I put on a spurt, but though I am a good walker, and we had by this time got into a less crowded part of the city, I could not overtake him. ‘Well,’ I reasoned, ‘if I can’t pass you, I can get rid of you in another way.’

“So I turned back, and crossed into an indirect route for home. This ran through a district inhabited by mechanics, and was quite clear for as far as I could see—a few children playing in front of the houses, and a solitary waggon rumbling along the blackened road, were the only objects in sight. It wasn’t a pleasant way

out, so I walked fast till I gained the suburb where I lived. When I reached the point where I had to turn again into the road I had quitted, I looked back to see if my aversion were in view. No; he had either stopped on the way, or passed off in some other direction. I associated him with a rude pushing crowd in the din and rattle of the main street of a large city. I thought of him as part of the rudeness and the pushing, the hot pavement, the smoky sky; and out here walking on the crunchy gravel of a country road, seeing green fields through blossoming hedges, under a clear blue sky, there seemed to be no place for him. It was therefore with no little emotion that at a sudden bend in the road I saw him walking slowly along about fifty yards ahead of me, but on the other side. My irritation, which had deepened into anger against him, now curdled into fear. I had important papers in my pockets, and some very damaging knowledge in my head. Could I have been recognised, and this man engaged by the other side to find out where I lived and worked, with a view to foul play? Seeing him thus at an angle instead of directly from the rear, I had a better view of him, and now I began to feel that I must know him, at least by sight. I quickened my steps, and this time with success, getting to within our former distance of about five yards (he on one side, and I on the other, of the road), at which I was content to remain, and observe. Yes, there was something in his manner, his walk, even in the cut and description of his clothes, that became more and more familiar to me. His face was turned towards the hedge—as I often turn it myself, for I am a bit of a botanist—as though looking for anything pretty or curious that might be amongst the ferns and wild flowers of the ditch. A good portion of his profile however was in view, and that also I thought I had seen before, though I ransacked my memory in vain to put a name to it. It seemed more like some face that had passed before me in a dream, or of which I had seen a portrait, than one that I had actually met in the flesh. I am not much of a dreamer. I could recall no dream that had impressed such a face upon my memory. I could remember no picture which could suggest it; and yet the feeling that I *knew* it became every moment more intense. By this time the fear I have mentioned passed off, absorbed in a burning curiosity to find out who he was, and why I should thus be influenced by him. For a moment's consideration showed that he was not *following* me. If he had been, he would have taken the detour I had made. Did he know where I lodged, and was he going to call? Was he simply bent upon a ramble that fine afternoon, out in my direction—a favourite one for ramblers—and I need not trouble my head



about him? *That* never occurred to me. I was confident we had been, or were to be, associated in some vital manner.

"We were now within a hundred yards of my pavilion. I had determined I would overtake and face him, if I had to run for it; but a strange faintness came over me, and, before I had completed half the distance, brought me to a dead halt. He was then, I suppose, about the width of the road from me. I saw him cross and make for the garden-gate. 'I was right,' I said to myself, 'he *has* business with me.' The latch of the gate was rather a complicated one. It worked, so to speak, upside down, and I had to fumble with it for several days before I got the trick of it. He lifted it at once, and passed in. As he did so he turned, and I had a full view of his face.

*"It was my face!"*

"I saw him walk up the path. I saw the landlady (Mrs. Lake) come out and hand him two letters. I saw him take them, open the door of the pavilion, and enter it!

. . . . .

"My next sensation was one of deadly nausea; and I can only tell what passed in the interim from hearsay. It seems that I wandered back into the town, and so conducted myself that I was taken into custody by an active and intelligent policeman, as 'drunk and incapable.' The sergeant at the station took a more lenient view. He thought I was an escaped lunatic. If I had told him my story, he would have felt *sure* of it. A doctor was sent for, who made a third diagnosis of my case. I had got into bad company, and been hounded. In this belief he gave me an emetic, which at any rate roused me into my senses. I passed a wretched night on a truckle bed in my clothes, and was 'discharged with a caution' in the morning.

"I took a cab and drove home, longing for a bath and clean linen, but, above all, for an explanation with my landlady. Why did she give that man my letters, and allow him to go into my rooms? *Had* she done so? or was it all a delusion? She, and she only, could decide.

"As I drove up I noticed a good many people about, in knots of threes and fours, talking earnestly, and several policemen.

More anxious than ever, I ran in. As I did so the landlady came out, threw up her arms, and, with a wild shriek, fell fainting upon the path before me. I looked round, as one will do, for somebody or something to help; and saw that my pavilion was a heap of ruins!

"Amidst a perfect Babel of questions, 'When did you leave?' 'How did you escape?' 'Were you inside when it fell?' and

the like, I got the poor woman taken into her room; and then, when she had recovered, the explanation was demanded of *me*.

"I was told that I returned at a quarter past five and went to my room to dress. The room fell in, and tore the whole place down just as the servant was going to lay the cloth for my dinner. They all thought that I was crushed to death under the ruins; 'and what did I mean by such conduct?—scaring the lives almost out of them in that way!' Some observations which I had overheard when I first came back, recalled to my memory that interrupted warning of the carpenter, and gave me a clue to the landlord's hesitation about letting me the pavilion I coveted. 'What do *you* mean, I said, by your conduct?—allowing me to take a place that was liable to tumble down at any moment?' This told, I got time to think, and under cover of questioning Mrs. Lake's statement as to *time*, had it emphatically confirmed as to *fact*—or what she, a woman in the full possession of her faculties, and without any object to deceive, was ready to swear to as fact. *I* had come home. She had given *me* my letters. *I* was in my room—to her certain knowledge—fifteen minutes before the roof fell in.

"I told them some of the truth. I had to go back to the town, and was kept so late that I slept there. When they supposed that those letters had something to do with it, I did not contradict them. All agreed that it was a wonderful interposition of Providence, and I did not gainsay that.

"I had the ruins carefully removed, nominally in order to recover my books and papers, but really because I would not disbelieve my senses. A man resembling me had entered the pavilion; you may say that I was overwrought and excited; that I had worked myself up to accept a delusion and was deluded—but how about Mrs. Lake? She was making up butter into pats when I came in, and had absolutely nothing on her mind, for it had turned out well. If a body were found under the ruins the mystery would be solved.

"No body was found, but amidst the wreck of my writing-table were the letters.

"Some six years afterwards I came by accident upon a curious book called 'Our Children in Heaven.' The author, a Swedenborgian, believes that our sons and daughters whom we lose in infancy grow up in a spiritual life—parallel (if I may use the word) to our own. That is to say, when we pass into the other world, we are met not by babes or children, but by grown-up men and women, educated as we would have liked them to be if they had never left us. Say what else you please about it, the idea is a

beautiful one, and set me thinking, set me asking questions amongst the elders of my family and my old nurse; the result of which was that I found I was born one of twins, but that the fact was suppressed for a very sad reason—when we were ten days old my poor mother was seized with puerperal mania, under the influence of which she strangled her other babe. That is one reason why I must ask you to give me your word that you will not publish this story in my lifetime. When I am dead you can use it as you please, but don't put my real name in it.”

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I have kept my word. He is six months in his grave, and his last words were: “*Dear brother, I am coming.*”

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## The Lady with the Carnations.

A DREAM OR A DELUSION?

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It was in the Louvre that I first saw her—or rather her picture. Greuze painted her—so I was told; but the name of the artist scarcely affected me—I was absorbed in the woman herself, who looked at me from the dumb canvas with that still smile on her face, and that burning cluster of carnations clasped to her breast. I felt that I knew her. Moreover, there was a strange attraction in her eyes that held mine fascinated. It was as though she said “Stay till I have told thee all!” A faint blush tinged her cheek,—one loose tress of fair hair fell caressingly on her half-uncovered bosom. And, surely, was I dreaming?—or did I smell the odour of carnations on the air? I started from my reverie,—a slight tremor shook my nerves. I turned to go. An artist carrying a large easel and painting materials just then approached, and placing himself opposite the picture, began to copy it. I watched him at work for a few moments—his strokes were firm, and his eye accurate; but I knew, without waiting to observe his further progress, that there was an indefinable something in that pictured face that he with all his skill would never be able to delineate as Greuze had done—if Greuze indeed were the painter, of which I did not then, and do not now, feel sure. I walked slowly away. On the threshold of the room I looked back. Yes! there it was—that fleeting, strange, appealing expression that seemed mutely to call to *me*; that half-wild yet sweet smile that had a world of unuttered pathos in it. A kind of misgiving troubled me,—a presentiment of evil that I could not understand,—and, vexed with myself for my own foolish imaginings, I hastened down the broad staircase that led to the picture galleries, and began to make my way out through that noble hall of ancient sculpture in which stands the defiantly beautiful *Apollo Belvidere* and the world-famous *Artemis*. The sun shone brilliantly; numbers of people were passing and repassing. Suddenly my heart gave a violent throb, and I stopped short in my walk, amazed and incredulous. Who was that seated on the bench close to the *Artemis*, reading? Who, if not “the Lady with the Carnations,” clad in white, her head slightly bent, and her

hand clasping a bunch of her own symbolic flowers! Nervously I approached her. As my steps echoed on the marble pavement she looked up; her gray-green eyes met mine in that slow wistful smile that was so indescribably sad. Confused as my thoughts were, I observed her pallor, and the ethereal delicacy of her face and form—she had no hat on, and her neck and shoulders were uncovered. Struck by this peculiarity, I wondered if the other people who were passing through the hall noticed her *déshabille*. I looked around me enquiringly—not one passer-by turned a glance in our direction! Yet surely the lady's costume was strange enough to attract attention? A chill of horror quivered through me,—was I the only one who saw her sitting there? This idea was so alarming that I uttered an involuntary exclamation; the next moment the seat before me was empty, the strange lady had gone, and nothing remained of her but—the strong sweet odour of the carnations she had carried! With a sort of sickness at my heart I hurried out of the Louvre, and was glad when I found myself in the bright Paris streets filled with eager, pressing people, all bent on their different errands of business or pleasure. I entered a carriage and was driven rapidly to the Grand Hotel, where I was staying with a party of friends. I refrained from speaking of the curious sensations that had overcome me—I did not even mention the picture that had exercised so weird an influence upon me. The brilliancy of the life we led, the constant change and activity of our movements, soon dispersed the nervous emotion I had undergone; and though sometimes the remembrance of it returned to me, I avoided dwelling on the subject. Ten or twelve days passed, and one night we all went to the Théâtre Français—it was the first evening of my life that I ever was in the strange position of being witness to a play without either knowing its name or understanding its meaning. I could only realize one thing—namely, that “the Lady with the Carnations” sat in the box opposite to me, regarding me fixedly. She was alone; her costume was unchanged. I addressed one of our party in a low voice:

“Do you see that girl opposite, in white, with the shaded crimson carnations in her dress?”

My friend looked, shook her head, and rejoined:

“No; where is she sitting?”

“Right opposite!” I repeated in a more excited tone. “Surely you can see her! She is alone in that large box *en face*.”

My friend turned to me in wonder. “You must be dreaming, my dear! That large box is perfectly empty!”

Empty!—I knew better. But I endeavoured to smile; I said



I had made a mistake—that the lady I spoke of had moved—and so changed the subject. But throughout the evening, though I feigned to watch the stage, my eyes were continually turning to the place where SHE sat so quietly, with her steadfast, mournful gaze fixed upon me. One addition to her costume she had—a fan—which from the distance at which I beheld it seemed to be made of very old yellow lace mounted on sticks of filigree silver. She used this occasionally, waving it slowly to and fro in a sort of dreamy, meditative fashion; and ever and again she smiled that pained, patient smile which, though it hinted much, betrayed nothing. When we rose to leave the theatre the Lady with the Carnations rose also, and drawing a lace wrap about her head, she disappeared. Afterwards I saw her gliding through one of the outer lobbies; she looked so slight and frail and childlike, alone in the pushing brilliant crowd, that my heart went out to her in a sort of fantastic tenderness. “Whether she be a disembodied spirit,” I mused, “or an illusion called up by some disorder of my own imagination, I do not know; but she seems so sad, that even were she a Dream, I pity her!”

This thought passed through my brain as in company with my friends I reached the outer door of the theatre. A touch on my arm startled me—a little white hand clasping a cluster of carnations rested there for a second,—then vanished. I was somewhat overcome by this new experience; but my sensations this time were not those of fear. I became certain that this haunting image followed me for some reason; and I determined not to give way to any foolish terror concerning it, but to calmly await the course of events, that would in time, I felt convinced, explain everything. I stayed a fortnight longer in Paris without seeing anything more of “the Lady with the Carnations,” except photographs of her picture in the Louvre, one of which I bought—though it gave but a feeble idea of the original masterpiece—and then I left for Brittany. Some English friends of mine, Mr. and Mrs. Fairleigh, had taken up their abode in a quaint old rambling château near Quimperlé on the coast of Finisterre, and they had pressed me cordially to stay with them for a fortnight—an invitation which I gladly accepted. The house was built on a lofty rock overlooking the sea; the surrounding coast was eminently wild and picturesque; and on the day I arrived, there was a boisterous wind which lifted high the crests of the billows and dashed them against the jutting crags with grand and terrific uproar. Mrs. Fairleigh, a bright, practical woman, whose life was entirely absorbed in household management, welcomed me with effusion—she and her two handsome boys, Rupert and Frank,

were full of enthusiasm for the glories and advantages of their holiday resort.

"Such a beach!" cried Rupert, executing a sort of Indian war-dance beside me on the path.

"And such jolly walks and drives!" chorussed his brother.

"Yes, really!" warbled my hostess in her clear gay voice; "I'm delighted we came here. And the château is such a funny old place, full of odd nooks and corners. The country people, you know, are dreadfully superstitious, and they say it is haunted; but of course that's all nonsense! Though if there were a ghost, we should send *you* to interrogate it, my dear!"

This with a smile of good-natured irony at me. I laughed. Mrs. Fairleigh was one of those eminently sensible persons who had seriously lectured me on a book known as 'A Romance of Two Worlds,' as inculcating spiritualistic theories, and therefore deserving condemnation.

I turned the subject.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"Three weeks—and we haven't explored half the neighbourhood yet. There are parts of the house itself we don't know. Once upon a time—so the villagers say—a great painter lived here. Well, his studio runs the whole length of the château, and that and some other rooms are locked up. It seems they are never let to strangers. Not that we want them—the place is too big for us as it is."

"What was the painter's name?" I enquired, pausing as I ascended the terrace to admire the grand sweep of the sea.

"Oh, I forget! His pictures were so like those of Greuze that few can tell the difference between them,—and——"

I interrupted her. "Tell me," I said, with a faint smile, "have you any carnations growing here?"

"Carnations! I should think so! The place is full of them. Isn't the odour delicious?" And as we reached the highest terrace in front of the château I saw that the garden was ablaze with these brilliant scented blossoms, of every shade, varying from the palest salmon pink to the deepest, darkest scarlet. This time that subtle fragrance was not my fancy, and I gathered a few of the flowers to wear in my dress at dinner. Mr. Fairleigh now came out to receive us, and the conversation became general.

I was delighted with the interior of the house; it was so quaint, and old, and suggestive. There was a dark oaken staircase, with a most curiously carved and twisted balustrade—some ancient tapestry still hung on the walls—and there were

faded portraits of stiff ladies in ruffs, and maliciously smiling knights in armour, that depressed rather than decorated the dining-room. The chamber assigned to me upstairs was rather bright than otherwise—it fronted the sea, and was cheerfully and prettily furnished. I noticed, however, that it was next door to the shut-up and long-deserted studio. The garden was, as Mrs. Fairleigh had declared, full of carnations. I never saw so many of these flowers growing in one spot. They seemed to spring up everywhere, like weeds, even in the most deserted and shady corners. I had been at the château some three or four days, when one morning I happened to be walking alone in a sort of shrubbery at the back of the house, when I perceived in the long dank grass at my feet a large grey stone, that had evidently once stood upright, but had now fallen flat, burying itself partly in the earth. There was something carved upon it. I stooped down, and clearing away the grass and weeds, made out the words

“MANON  
*Cœur perfide !*”

Surely this was a strange inscription ! I told my discovery to the Fairleighs, and we all examined and re-examined the mysterious slab, without being able to arrive at any satisfactory explanation of its meaning. Even enquiries made among the villagers failed to elicit anything save shakes of the head, and such remarks as “Ah, Madame ! si on savait . . .,” or “Je crois bien qu’il y a une histoire là !”

One evening we all returned to the château at rather a later hour than usual, after a long and delightful walk on the beach in the mellow radiance of a glorious moon. When I went to my room I had no inclination to go to bed—I was wide awake, and moreover in a sort of expectant frame of mind ; expectant, though I knew not what I expected. I threw my window open, leaning out and looking at the moon-enchanted sea, and inhaling the exquisite fragrance of the carnations wafted to me on every breath of the night wind. I thought of many things—the glory of life ; the large benevolence of Nature ; the mystery of death ; the beauty and certainty of immortality ; and then, though my back was turned to the interior of my room, I knew,—I felt, I was no longer alone. I forced myself to move round from the window ; slowly but determinedly I brought myself to confront whoever it was that had thus entered through my locked door ; and I was scarcely surprised when I saw “the Lady with the Carnations” standing at a little distance from me, with a most woebegone, appealing expression on her shadowy lovely face. I looked at her,

resolved not to fear her ; and then brought all my will to bear on unravelling the mystery of my strange visitant. As I met her gaze unflinchingly she made a sort of timid gesture with her hands, as though she besought something.

"Why are you here?" I asked, in a low, clear tone. "Why do you follow me?"

Again she made that little appealing movement. Her answer, soft as a child's whisper, floated through the room :

"You pitied me!"

"Are you unhappy?"

"Very!" And here she clasped her wan white fingers together in a sort of agony. I was growing nervous, but I continued :

"Tell me, then, what you wish me to do?"

She raised her eyes in passionate supplication.

"Pray for me! No one has prayed for me ever since I died—no one has pitied me for a hundred years!"

"How did you die?" I asked, trying to control the rapid beating of my heart. The Lady with the Carnations smiled most mournfully, and slowly unfastened the cluster of flowers from her breast—there her white robe was darkly stained with blood. She pointed to the stain, and then replaced the flowers. I understood.

"Murdered!" I whispered, more to myself than to my pale visitor—"murdered!"

"No one knows, and no one prays for me!" wailed the faint sweet spirit voice—"and though I am dead I cannot rest. Pray for me—I am tired!"

And her slender head drooped wearily—she seemed about to vanish. I conquered my rising terrors by a strong effort, and said :

"Tell me—you *must* tell me"—here she raised her head, and her large pensive eyes met mine obediently—"who was your murderer?"

"He did not mean it," she answered. "He loved me. It was here"—and she raised one hand and motioned towards the adjacent studio—"here he drew my picture. He thought me false—but I was true. '*Manon cœur perfide!*' Oh, no, no, no! It should be '*Manon cœur fidèle!*'"

She paused and looked at me appealingly. Again she pointed to the studio.

"Go and see!" she sighed. "Then you will pray—and I will never come again. Promise you will pray for me—it was here he killed me—and I died without a prayer."

"Where were you buried?" I asked, in a hushed voice.

"In the waves," she murmured; "thrown in the wild cold waves; and no one knew—no one ever found poor Manon; alone and sad for a hundred years, with no word said to God for her!"

Her face was so full of plaintive pathos, that I could have wept. Watching her as she stood, I knelt at the quaint old prie-dieu just within my reach, and prayed as she desired. Slowly, slowly, slowly a rapturous light came into her eyes; she smiled and waved her hands towards me in farewell. She glided backwards towards the door—and her figure grew dim and indistinct. For the last time she turned her now radiant countenance upon me, and said in thrilling accents—

"Write, '*Manon cœur fidèle*!'"

I cannot remember how the rest of the night passed; but I know that with the early morning, rousing myself from the stupor of sleep into which I had fallen, I hurried to the door of the closed studio. It was ajar! I pushed it boldly open and entered. The room was long and lofty, but destitute of all furniture save a battered-looking, worm-eaten easel that leaned up against the damp stained wall. I approached this relic of the painter's art, and examining it closely, perceived the name "Manon" cut roughly yet deeply upon it. Looking curiously about, I saw what had nearly escaped my notice—a sort of hanging cupboard, on the left-hand side of the large central bay window. I tried its handle—it was unlocked, and opened easily. Within it lay three things—a palette, on which the blurring marks of long obliterated pigments were still faintly visible; a dagger, unsheathed, with its blade almost black with rust; and—the silver filigree sticks of a fan, to which clung some mouldy shreds of yellow lace. I remembered the fan the Lady with the Carnations had carried at the Théâtre Français, and pieced together her broken story. She had been slain by her artist-lover—slain in a sudden fit of jealousy ere the soft colours on his picture of her were yet dry—murdered in this very studio; and no doubt that hidden dagger was the weapon used. Poor Manon! Her frail body had been cast from the high rock on which the château stood "into the wild cold waves," as she or her spirit had said; and her cruel lover had carried his wrath against her so far as to perpetuate a slander against her by writing "*Cœur perfide*" on that imperishable block of stone! Full of pitying thoughts I shut the cupboard, and slowly left the studio, closing the door noiselessly after me.

That morning as soon as I could get Mrs. Fairleigh alone I told her my adventure, beginning with the very first experience I had had of the picture in the Louvre. Needless to say, she heard me with the utmost incredulity.



"I know you, my dear!" she said, shaking her head at me wisely; "you are full of fancies, and always dreaming about the next world, as if this one wasn't good enough for you. The whole thing is a delusion."

"But," I persisted, "you know the studio was shut and locked; how is it that it is open now?"

"It isn't open!" declared Mrs. Fairleigh—"though I'm quite willing to believe you dreamt it *was*."

"Come and see!" I exclaimed eagerly; and I took her upstairs, though she was somewhat reluctant to follow me. As I had said, the studio *was* open. I led her in, and showed her the name cut on the easel, and the hanging cupboard with its contents. As these convincing proofs of my story met her eyes, she shivered a little, and grew rather pale.

"Come away," she said nervously—"you are really *too* horrid! I can't bear this sort of thing! For goodness' sake, keep your ghosts to yourself!" I saw she was vexed and pettish, and I readily followed her out of the barren, forlorn-looking room. Scarcely were we well outside the door when it shut with a sharp click. I tried it—it was fast locked! This was too much for Mrs. Fairleigh. She rushed downstairs in a perfect paroxysm of terror; and when I found her in the breakfast-room she declared she would not stop another day in the house. I managed to calm her fears, however; but she insisted on my remaining with her to brave out whatever else might happen at what she persisted now in calling the "haunted" château, in spite of her practical theories. And so I stayed on. And when we left Brittany, we left all together, without having had our peace disturbed by any more manifestations of an unearthly nature. One thing alone troubled me a little—I should have liked to obliterate the word "*perfidie*" from that stone, and to have had "*fidèle*" carved on it instead; but it was too deeply engraved for this. However, I have seen no more of "the Lady with the Carnations." But I know the dead need praying for—and that they often suffer for lack of such prayers,—though I cannot pretend to explain the reason why. And I know that the picture in the Louvre is not a Greuze, though it is called one—it is the portrait of a faithful woman deeply wronged; and her name is here written as she told me to write it—

"MANON  
*Cœur Fidèle!*"

MARIE CORELLI.

## The Curé of Cucugnan.\*

EVERY year, at Candlemas, the provincial poets publish in Avignon a gay little book filled up to the brim with beautiful verses and pretty stories. That of this year has just reached me, and I find in it a delightful little tale that I am going to try and transcribe for you by abridging it a little. . . . Parisians, hold out your baskets. It is with the finest provincial meal-flour that you are going to be served this time.

The Abbot Martin was Curé . . . of Cucugnan. Excellent as bread, sterling as gold, he loved his Cucugnanards with paternal devotion; for him, his Cucugnan would have been a paradise upon earth, if only the Cucugnanards had given him a little more satisfaction. But, alas! spiders spun their webs in his confessional, and, on fair Easterday, the holy wafers lay untouched in the pyx. The good priest was heartbroken about it, and was always asking grace of God that he might not die until he had led back to the fold his scattered flock.

Now, you shall hear how his prayer was heard. One Sunday, after the gospel, M. Martin ascended the pulpit.

"My brethren," said he, "believe me or not, as you will: the other night I found myself, miserable sinner that I am, at the gate of paradise.

"I knocked: St. Peter opened to me.

"'Aha! Is it you, my good M. Martin?' said he to me. 'What good wind blows you hither? What can I do for you?'

"'Good St. Peter, you who hold the great book and the key, could you tell me,—if I am not too curious,—how many Cucugnanards you have in paradise?'

"'I can refuse nothing to you, M. Martin; sit down, and let us look into the matter together.'

"And St. Peter took up his great book, opened it, and put on his spectacles.

"'Let us see: Cucugnan, did you say? Cu—Cu—Cucugnan. Ah! here we are. Cucugnan. . . . Why, my dear M. Martin, the page is a perfect blank. Not a soul upon it. . . . There are no more Cucugnanards here than there are fish-bones in a turkey-hen.'

\* From the French of *A. Daudet*.

"What! No one here from Cucugnan? Not one? It is impossible! Look again, please."

"Not one, holy sir. Look for yourself, if you think I am joking."

"Woe is me! I stamped my feet, and with clasped hands cried for pity."

"Then said St. Peter: 'Really, M. Martin, you must not distress yourself in this fashion, or you will bring on a serious fit of apoplexy. After all, it is not your fault. Your Cucugnanards, do you see, are surely only undergoing a little quarantine in purgatory.'

"Ah! in the name of charity, mighty St. Peter! enable me at least to see them, to see and to console them."

"Willingly, my friend! Stay. Whip on these shoes: the roads are not over good. . . . There, that will do nicely. . . . Now walk away, walk away, straight before you. Do you see yonder, down there at the turning? You will find there a silver door studded all over with black crosses . . . to the right-hand side. . . . You will knock, and they will open to you. . . . Ta-ta! Take care of yourself, and keep up your spirits."

"And I walked, and walked, on and on! What a hunt it was! I feel all goose-flesh only to think of it. A little footpath full of brambles, blazing carbuncles, and hissing serpents led me to the silver door."

"Tap! Tap!"

"Who knocks?" called out to me a hoarse and mournful voice.

"The Curé of Cucugnan."

"Of——?"

"Of Cucugnan."

"Ah! . . . Come in."

"I entered. A grand angel, with wings as sombre as night, clad in a robe as brilliant as day, with a diamond key hanging from his girdle, was writing—scratch, scratch—in a huge book, much larger than that of St. Peter."

"Now, then; what is it you want?" observed the angel.

"Beautiful angel of God, I wish to know—I am very curious, perhaps—if you have here the Cucugnanards?"

"The——?"

"The Cucugnanards—the people of Cucugnan; because it is I who am their prior."

"Ah! The Abbot Martin, is it not?"

"At your service, M. Angel."

“‘You said Cucugnan, didn’t you?’ And the angel opened his great book and ran through the pages, wetting his finger in order the better to turn over the leaves.

“‘Cucugnan,’ said he, as he heaved a deep sigh. . . . ‘M. Martin, we have in purgatory no one from Cucugnan.’

“‘Jesu! Marie! Joseph! no one from Cucugnan in purgatory! Oh, great God! where are they then?’

“‘Eh! holy man, why they are in paradise! Where the deuce else would you have them be?’

“‘But I come from it—from paradise.’

“‘You come from it! . . . Well?’

“‘Well! *They are not there!* Ah, blessed mother of angels!’

“‘What would you have, M. Curé? If they are neither in paradise nor yet in purgatory, there is no other alternative—they are in——’

“‘Holy Cross! Jesu, son of David! Woe! woe! woe! is it possible! Could it be a falsehood of the great St. Peter? Yet, I did not hear the cock crow! Woe is me! how could I go to paradise if my Cucugnanards were not there too?’

“‘Listen to me, my poor M. Martin. Since you wish, at any cost, to be assured of all this, and to see with your own eyes how the matter stands, take this footpath and run along it—if you know how to run. You will find to the left a great gateway. There they will give you all information. God grant it you!’

“And the angel shut the door.

“It was a long footpath all paved with red embers. I staggered as if I was drunk; at each step I stumbled; I was bathed in perspiration—every hair on my body had its separate drop of sweat—and I panted with thirst. But, truly, thanks to the sandals which the good St. Peter had lent me, I did not burn my feet.

“When I had hobbled along some way, I saw to my left hand a door—no, a gateway—an enormous gateway yawning open, like the mouth of a vast furnace. Oh! my children, what a sight! *There* no one asked for my name; *there* there was no register. It is in batches, and through the wide-open door, that one enters there, my brethren; just as on Sunday you go trooping into the wine-shops.

“I sweated great drops, and yet I was benumbed, I shivered. My hair stood on end. I smelt the burning of roast flesh, something like the smell which spreads about in our Cucugnan when Eloy, the blacksmith, burns the hoof of an old donkey while

shoeing him. I was stifled in this stinking, burning atmosphere; I heard a horrible clamour—groanings, yellings, and cursings.

“‘Well! art thou coming in, or art thou not?’ said a horned demon to me as he prodded me with his fork.

“‘I? I am not coming in. I am a friend of God!’

“‘Thou a friend of God! . . . Thou! . . . Scurvy old rascal! . . . What art thou doing here, then?’

“‘I come—ah! do not speak of it; I can hardly keep myself up—I come—from far—humbly to ask you—if—if by any chance—you should have here—any one—any one from Cucugnan!’

“‘Ah! fire of God! thou art playing the fool. As if thou didst not know that *all* Cucugnan is here! Stay, ugly old brute, look! and thou wilt see how we arrange for them here, thy famous Cucugnanards! . . .’

“And I saw, in the midst of a frightful whirlwind of flame, tall Coq-Galine,—you all knew him, my brethren,—Coq-Galine, who was so often drunk, and so often shook his fists at his poor Clairon. I saw Caterinet—that little hussy—with her nose in the air, who slept all alone in the barn. Do you remember it? But let us pass on; I have already said too much about it. I saw Pascal Doigt-de-Poix, who manufactured his oil with the olives belonging to M. Julien. I saw Babet the gleaner, who, while gleanng, in order the more quickly to make up her bundle, helped herself from the sheaves. I saw Master Crapasi, who so cleverly oiled the wheel of his wheelbarrow; and Dauphine, who sold her well-water so dear. I saw Tortillard, who, when he met me bearing the good God, went on his way, cap on head and pipe in mouth—as proud as Lucifer—as if it were only a dog he had met. I saw Coulan with his Zette, and Jacques, and Pierre, and Toni. . . .”

Terrified, white with fear, the congregation groaned as they pictured to themselves, in wide-open hell, one his father, another his mother, another his grandmother, his sister——

“You know well, my brethren,” continued the good Abbot Martin—“you know well that this cannot last. I have charge of your souls, and I *will*, I *will* save you from the abyss whither you are plunging headlong. To-morrow I shall set myself to the task, no later than to-morrow. And there will be no lack of work! This is how I shall arrange matters. In order that all may go well, all must be done in order. We will proceed row by row, as they do when they dance at Jonquières.



"To-morrow, Monday, I will confess the old men and women. That will be nothing.

"Tuesday, the children. I shall soon have finished.

"Wednesday, the bigger boys and girls. That may be a long business.

"Thursday, the men. We will cut it short.

"Friday, the women. I should say 'No tales.'

"Saturday, the miller! One day for him all alone will not be too much.

"And if by Sunday we have finished we shall be very lucky.

"You see, my children, when the corn is ripe it must be cut, when the wine is tapped it must be drunk. There is enough of dirty linen here; it must be washed, and well washed, too.

"This is the grace which I long for you all. Amen."

What was said was done. The wash proceeded forthwith.

Since that memorable Sunday, the perfume of the virtues of Cucugnán has spread for ten leagues round; and the good pastor, M. Martin, happy and full of cheerfulness, dreamed the other night that, followed by his entire flock, he climbed in resplendent procession the starry path up to the heavens, amidst lighted tapers, and clouds of incense which enveloped the choristers as they sang the *Te Deum*.

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## In an Old Chateau.

By MRS. W. K. CLIFFORD.

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OFTEN in the twilight, as I sit here alone thinking it all over, the door opens and there enters the tall woman with the faded hair and tired face.

“Mother,” she says, “shall I play to you a little while before it grows quite dark?” She has always called me mother since he went away; always since, but before it seemed as if her lips were too stubborn to say the word. Sometimes I fancy it is his voice that says it now. I look up at her for a moment as she stands there waiting. Poor soul! I think you should be young still; sorrow has taken away your youth and brought age to take shelter before you had made ready for it. But her eyes are dull, she does not know my thoughts nor wonder concerning them; she does not think or care, or even grieve now, but only waits and dreams of all that has been once, and never shall be again.

“Yes, dear,” I answer; “go and play before it grows quite dark; but do not speak again till you have finished—it sends them all away, and leaves me quite alone.” For in the twilight, when no human voice breaks through the darkness gathering round as though it were a veil to hide what mortal eyes might not behold, it seems as if the door of an unseen world were opened wide. Unseen hands undo the silent latch, and wondering eyes look in once more at all that never again may be theirs. But the sound of a voice, and the door is swiftly closed again. The music does but bring them here; they know it well, for it was once their own; and through the gloom they steal with soundless steps to hear it once again. I have seen their faces many a time, have heard the soft trailing of their garments as they departed, have stood up gently on tiptoe not daring to go forward a single step, have watched them hurry farther and farther away, grey and indistinct, till they have vanished altogether.

She goes to the piano, an old carved piano, that is crazy with age and memories. As she sits down her face is even with a window; she has but to turn her head and she can see through the diamond-shaped panes of glass into the dark wood beyond the garden. The trees wave to and fro, backwards and forwards, touching each other with their long branches, as if with the shadows there had come

to them strange messages of which they must whisper till all the black copse knows them. She puts her cold hands down on the keys, a little shudder goes through me as they meet. The fire burns low while she plays, the darkness gathers closer and closer, as though it came from a world that was full of it, and must cover all the indistinct space left in the empty room. But except the music there is silence everywhere. The notes are like the tones of a passionate voice from which time has taken the joy and freshness, yet left the fire behind. I cannot see her eyes, but I know there is no expression in them as she goes on playing, as she stares vacantly out at the wood unconsciously watching for one she never will see again. All the life left in her has crept to the ends of her fingers and finds expression there. But she does not know even this, for she is a stranger still to some other self that has been hers, that waits and pleads to be hers again, but, silent and dogged, she will not listen. But, oh ! my dear, if ever you awake, you will perhaps some day sit here alone as I sit now, and remember all that stood beside you, that cried out longing to be heard and understood, while you were blind and dumb. You will think of it bitterly, you who sit there awaking the dead, calling back once more those who have all been dust these many years.

At last her fingers tire, the sounds grow fainter and fainter, as though they were following some one away into the distance. I crouch down nearer to the fire, I who am left behind, without power to move one single step onward into the country that is but just beyond the nearest shadow.

"Oh ! it is too much," I cry, "too much to ask, that I should bear all this alone."

The woman who has been playing gets up, closes the piano, and, with one last look out towards the wood, departs. The sound of her footsteps dies away. She has gone to the little room at the end of the long corridor where his books are kept, where his portrait hangs, and his chair stands in the corner. It is all the same, just as it used to be when he was here ; even his fishing-rod hangs on the two nails against the wall, though it has not been used since he was a boy. I hear the door shut, and know she is within, that she sits down and looks round, half afraid, wondering what the strange knowledge is that hangs about the room and makes her cower and shiver. I cannot go to her, I am too old ; but my heart cries after her, "He will never come back, never,—never. Just as the father went, so has the boy gone ; just as you look out to-night, so did I look out all those years ago. As you sit and wait for him who will never return, so do I sit and wait even still—oh, my dear, my dear, who never will come again, and never will hear me more !"

If she had only cared, in the days that are gone, for that which came to her, for all that she threw away—if she had only cared! But her heart was as cold as December sun, as his hands that now are folded on his breast. I knew it from the first hour I saw her on the day he brought her home five years ago. Five years or ten? I cannot tell, for in my heart it is a hundred. He brought her in, and before I had never seen her face nor heard her voice. He had thrown one arm round her shoulder, and in his voice there was the old boyish ring of happiness.

“Mother, here is my wife,” he cried. “I have brought her home, and you and she will love each other.” He stooped and kissed her, while he put out his hand to me. I looked at her for a moment before I folded her to my heart, and my lips felt stiff and cold. In that one moment it all flashed through me,—I saw in her eyes what the end would be. I could have sat down and wept, but that it seemed too terrible for words. I kissed her first on one chilly cheek and then on the other, feeling the while that she shuddered and shrank from me.

“My son’s wife,” I said gently, holding the thin fingers that seemed trying to slip through mine; “how happy you must be, how happy you will be all your life long!”

It was as if some false voice said the words, for I knew that in mine there could have been but sorrow and dismay.

They lived here together in the old home—the home in which his ancestors had lived for many a generation, from which his father had gone forth in the full of youth and strength, never to enter more. They lived here and waited for the rest of life, she silent and sad-looking, little enough like a bride; he happy as the birds, and, like them, now and again in the early morning breaking out into snatches of song.

I made ready to go, thinking that they were young and would be better alone. There was the stone house twenty miles away, the lonely house with the square-walled garden to which the widows of many of our race had gone when the young ones mated. But the boy would not hear of my leaving the home in which I had lived my life, and the white-faced bride looked up and entreated me to stay, seeming as though she feared to be left alone with him, though he loved her so. And at last I gave way and stayed, having my rooms given me and living alone in them, glad to be quiet, to think of the past, to wonder what the future would be, to shut my eyes and live over the long years again, and the day on which the boy’s father went forth never to return. Years and years ago it all happened, the longest years that ever Time dragged over the world, yet in a moment I can cross them all and see my best-loved’s face. Many a

time in thought have I wandered down the paths again that my feet have not dared to tread since my world's sun set. All the fields I know, and every primrose-bank, and the corner where the rose-leaves always fell first and fast—their perfume stole past the place where the spring flowers died. They made me shudder afterwards, those same roses that once had seemed like a part of my own life; the sight of them now is but another sting of pain, like the blinding flashes of morning sunshine, or the woods thick with the flowers of spring. It has been so swift, as I sat alone, to get back to the happy years, so long the return journey to the end. The end? There has been none, only I know what it will be, though time goes slowly, as if it hesitated and held back, trying to hide that which it took in its arms all the weary while ago. They said he would return, he who went away laughing to hide his sorrow at parting, kissing his hand till he and the distance were one, while I stood watching him go—farther and farther away—he who never by shadow or shine my eyes would look on more. I sat and thought of the ship that sailed, of the strange port at which he would land, of the brave deeds he would do, of the long days beneath the burning sun, and of how at last, with the victory won, he would set his face towards home again, counting the days till we should meet. I sat and thought, while the ship went on and on over an endless sea to a strange far land beyond. That is all I know. Never a sign came, never a word or token; only at last the knowledge that he must have found the path along which for human feet there is no returning, or my listening ears would have heard his footstep, my longing eyes would have seen his face. But no, waiting and for ever waiting, and never an end to it;—by the rose-corner that makes my heart fail; through the woods that have mocked me all these years with their springing flowers; beneath the dark firs that whisper and know;—day after day, till the days have become years, and the years a life-time that has been a death-time. Some day when I am dying, it cannot be far off now, for I have grown old in the waiting years, shall I hear the eager step and the tender voice? Will he come and hold out his arms at last, or will it be all a mockery still?

For months they lived their quiet life together here, the boy and his strange bride. Every day I heard their footsteps coming down the long corridor, he and she together. They entered and stayed with me a little space, telling of all they had done or meant to do. They seemed happy enough, or he did, for if her face was sometimes sad, I did not think of it much; I knew so little of her or of her history. In my thoughts she was still a stranger, and though my heart had love for her, yet it seemed as though its door shut as she drew near. So I troubled little about the sadness on her face.



I knew it could not stay there long, that happiness must find her soon, seeing that she was the boy's wife, and would spend her whole life by his side. Yet as the days went by there was no change; her eyes were dull, and in them there were sometimes tears, as though she had memories of sorrow. But he was always glad, on his face there was a look of great content, in his voice a ring of happiness; and since she was the cause of all this, how could I help but love her, even though her manner forbade me to make a sign? She never came to me alone; never once did she sit down beside me and talk, as happy women will, in laughing whispers, or look up at me as though she remembered that between us lived the life with which her own was bound. If he had but married a happy woman, I used to think; if he had but taken some bright young life to join to his—a girl with a merry laugh on her lips, with gladness looking out from her eyes, with strength in her straight young limbs, who would have walked among us proudly, yet laughed at our old-world ways, and loved us—a girl who would have filled the house with snatches of song and bits of sunshine, who would have made the stairs over which so many of our dead had walked awake and creak with life as her quick glad feet ran down them—a girl who would have hung on his arm, looking up at his face to read her own life's history. He and she—the pretty bride I gave him in my dreaming—how happy they were together! I sat over the smouldering ashes many a twilight hour, hearing all they said to each, leaning forward to see more clearly into her sweet young face, and laughed in their happiness, till with a start I awoke and looked round, and shuddered at my dream, and covered my face, and dreaded what might come of that which was no dream at all, but a sad and strange reality.

The months went by, and then came the beginning of that which from the first had but been waiting to chase away the foolish make-believe of happiness that had made the house feel half-ashamed, though it never once put off its sadness or was duped. The months went by, and gradually the happiness went from his face and left him grave and silent. Not all at once did it go, but slowly and surely, as a thing that is dying out of the world. He seemed at first as one awaking from sleep who feels his dream slipping away and dreads the returning to sorrow; yet he said nothing. My heart tried in vain to divine the reason of it all, and his lips had none to give. It was as if between him and her there had grown up a silence, a knowledge that neither could help, but that had quenched a light, had broken a promise, and for him had put an end to many things that in the future he had meant to do and had left him suddenly sad and silent, facing some terrible truth from which there was no appeal. Then as the summer



passed her face changed, over it there stole a look of content and happy waiting. And soon I knew that it was because of a child that was coming. Her life was waiting, her heart was longing to see her little one's face; when she spoke there was a light in her eyes, a smile that came and went about her lips, and seemed to fill her soul with satisfaction. Then I knew and understood. For this promise to her future she was glad; but for him who loved her, whose wife she was, her heart had no answer, no place. But why had he loved her, and why was she his, this strange woman of the silence and sadness? But none could tell me the history of it all.

Then came whole days and weeks in which they did not come to me. They held aloof as if afraid, as if they had some secret and feared lest unwittingly they might betray it. I did not hear their voices, for there had grown up everywhere a silence, nor see them, save when they crossed to the fir wood at the end of the garden. I watched them hurrying to it, one or the other, always alone, as if one went with his sorrow, and one with her joy; but together they had no business more. At last a day came when he stood before me and spoke—my boy with the brightness gone from his brave clear eyes.

"Mother," he said, "I am going. I do not know when I shall return, but be good to her and do not blame her. It was my folly, my own headstrong madness."

"Going where, my son?"

"I do not know, dear mother," he answered, "but far off, it cannot be too far," he added bitterly. "Remember this, that she stays here, and the little one must be happy. There is nothing to blame her for, —promise me you will think so? It was my own blindness and folly and obstinacy." The tears came into my eyes, and that last time I saw my boy's face it was but through their mist. I struggled to hide them, for we were never cowards or wept as foolish women, who spend their love and sorrow on tears and then forget, break down and weep when they should most be still and show their hearts are strong to bear as well as love.

"But when will you come back?" I asked, while round my throat a cold hand seemed to tighten. "When will you come back?" I cried, with sick fear fastening at my heart.

"I cannot tell. When she is dead, if I am living." He took me in his arms and raised his head to look at me. Then he was silent for a moment, as one who sees a face he loves for a last time, and would take its memory with him to the wide world's end—to remember, perhaps, when at last he enters the heavenly gates. "When she is dead, if I am living," he repeated. "I will come then to see her once again before they lay her down to rest; and if not, then you will

understand. Oh, mother, I loved her!" and suddenly he let go his arms, and kissing me, turned away.

He went, and I stood watching. Is it not part of a woman's life that she must watch and wait so much, while all the world seems slipping by, save that which never greets her eyes, and she is left alone at last, faint with seared hope?

When he was gone, when the room was empty again, and an air of desolation spread slowly over all things, then I went out into the gallery and looked at a picture that had been ours for many a generation. A hundred years ago it had all happened, that which was set forth, yet still in the picture a dead man lay with a dead woman on his heart. The hunters had gone forth in the morning, so the story ran, and she had waited—as woman for ever waits. When the evening came, a feast was set, and the revellers arrived. It was time for the huntsmen to return, but the hours went on and there was not a sign of them. The night sped and still they lagged. At last there were hurried steps, and a horseman stopped and entered. He tried to lead away the fair young wife, but she stood still and speechless, as though Heaven had put its hand on her. The revellers gathered round with scared faces, and lips they did not dare to open lest they should betray the fear that had seized them, trying to hide from her, though it were but for a moment, that which was coming. But she stood silent in the midst, till there was a sound that made her start and her lips grow white—the tramp of many feet. Slowly and heavily the footsteps came nearer, as though above them was a burden. She raised her head for a moment as they carried the dead man in. She watched them lay him down, then with a cry she fell forward, and her heart stood still as it touched his. How blessed were you, poor soul! How merciful was death, that just folded you in its arms with him in one long sleep. A thousand things might have come between you in life, but when death had given you to each other, no power beneath the sky could part you more. And yet they did not celebrate the feast that had been made ready. Cruel and cowardly! They that when you could see and hear and share their joy had rejoiced over your marriage for a few short years had not courage to raise one single glass to that sweet marriage that neither time, nor chance, nor Heaven itself would undo.

At last I turned away from the picture to go back to my own rooms, to sit alone and think again; and as I turned I saw that my son's wife had been behind me, looking up too at the lovers. There was a mocking light in her eyes, a look of defiance on her face, and yet I thought she trembled as she stood waiting for me to speak.

"I have been looking at that picture," I said; "it is a hundred years and more since it all happened."

"Yes," she answered, "a hundred years and more, and they have long been dead."

I put out my hand trying to touch hers, but she drew back coldly.

"My dear," I said gently, "your face is white, and you look sad enough. Are you grieving for your husband, or for those two lying there, with all the world for ever at an end?"

"Not for them," she answered bitterly. "They loved. Why should one grieve for those who love and are together? And why should I grieve for your son? He must go where he pleases."

"But you two love and are apart."

"No, we do not love!" she said fiercely. "We never loved. He loved, and I was loved. It is ever so—one loves, and the other is loved."

"Tell me more," I whispered, for I could not raise my voice.

"There is nothing more to tell—or that I will tell. They made me marry him, and he would not be refused. He was mad, I think," she cried; "for what was there in me to love? And in him I found nothing. He was good—not that goodness counts for much to a woman's heart, and it was nothing to mine. He was good," she repeated wearily, "and had many things to give. Yes, you may look at me in wonder; but had he been poor I should not have been his wife, though it was not I who wanted his money, but those who had control of me. I had no love for him, and he knew it. That had been given long before to a man who was a coward—yes, and worse. I see that now, as we see many things when all are too late. A coward, and yet I loved him better than your son—loved the ground over which he trod when he came and lied to me better than your son's voice, when he swore he loved me and it was God's own truth. He deserted me, the man I loved, yet still I went on caring like a blind fool, giving his lying and cowardice fine names to myself, and when I could do so no longer, thinking them a thing apart from himself, as little he as the coat he wore; and yet besides there was nothing that could be called by his name."

"But if you loathe him now?"

"What then?" she cried bitterly; "it is too late. Can you drain wine from empty bottles, raise flames from cold white ashes, or find life-blood in a dead woman's heart? I could sit and wring my hands for the man who has never lived save in my imagination. I had scorn for the thing I saw, but I broke my heart for the thing about which I had only dreamt. And I had no love for the man who loved me and was content with so little. I was like a dead woman," she burst out passionately, clasping her hands—"I have been ever since. They wanted me to marry your son, and he wanted to marry me; whether I wanted to marry him he was too absorbed in his own

madness to care. I married him," she went on bitterly. "What did it matter? That in me that felt or knew or cared was dead, and all things were the same; marriage vows were not more than other words had come to be, all alike bitter, sad, and hopeless."

"Tell me why he married you?" I asked, looking up at the picture of the woman pillowed on her dead lover's breast, and holding on to the chair in which the dead man's father had sat all the years ago. I could have borne to have seen my son lying as he who was brought in to the untouched feast was lying; but this that had come to pass—oh, God! that allowed it, what did it mean? "Did he love you so much that he would marry you even without your caring for him?" I looked at her while I spoke. Never had she been beautiful; even when I saw her first she was worn and white and weary, her eyes were dull, her hair was faded, and youth, though it was hers still, and would be for many a year, seemed blighted. What had my son with his merry heart and joyous voice seen in this strange woman that he must take her to him?

"He was mad, I suppose," she answered, the excitement passing from her face, "as all are mad at some time. Lately, he has been growing sane, and he has gone."

"Whither?" I asked breathlessly.

"I do not know. What concern is it of mine? He is better gone than here. He would not stay and let me go, because of the child that is coming. When that has come, then nothing will matter more to him or me. I was so glad at first," she went on sadly, "that it was coming; but that was only selfishness—just selfish gladness, because I wanted it so. What is there to rejoice at?—one life more, a life through us, to suffer and to sorrow, to stare aghast at all the pitiless world can do, to sit alone at last when all the mockery is over and wait for death. I wish it were born dead!" she burst out suddenly. "I cannot bear to think of another soul in the world, to ache and grieve, to struggle with life till it is time to struggle with death. I wish it were born dead." The words echoed through the empty gallery; it seemed as if unseen listeners, gathering near, whispered, and carried them through an open door into a world the portal of which was close beside us, though mortal eyes might not look up to see.

"I wish it were born dead," she cried again, and clasped her hands. "Why did I let them marry me to your son? Why was I so cruel? He, a good man, who knew life but to rejoice; and I, a woman whose heart had been given to another man to tread under foot, and who had known life but to sorrow. I thought it would not matter, that it would be all the same, married or single; but it has not been so. I thought it would be like a play, and I a player could act



my part; but I could not." Then she turned to me defiantly. "Do you hate me much?" she asked curiously.

"No, I do not hate you," I said slowly, hardly knowing what she had asked or I had answered.

"I do not care; I cannot. Let me go; I want to be alone."

"But my son! Will he never return?"

"I do not know. What is your son to me?" And in a mocking voice she added, "He will come when I am dead, perhaps." She looked out at the fir-wood as she spoke; I knew that she was thinking of the burial-place just half a mile beyond it. She turned away, and shivering with cold and weariness, walked slowly along the gallery; I watched her gown trailing noiselessly over the shining floor, a door shut, and I was alone.

Then came a long silence in our lives. Day after day, week after week passed by, with never a sign of him. An old woman sorrowing, a young one doggedly waiting; that was all. The leaves fell dead and yellow, the wind carried them whistling over the grass towards the wood, the branches, bare and brown, stretched up towards the sky. Everything was grey, and cold, and silent.

The new year dawned. I thought of the strange long years behind it that had had no history save that they were spent in waiting; but with the new year there came no change to our still lives.

The winter passed, the snow melted from even the coldest paths, and at last once more there was the promise of spring. I watched the first bright sunshine glint through the fir-trees and fleck the dark ground with its gold, I saw the shadows dance and the snowdrops raise their tender heads.

One day I stood by the window thinking how beautiful the world had grown, for there was happiness everywhere save in one sad house. From my lips burst forth the cry of my heart, "If he would but come back again!" A little bird sang loud and clear; it was like a promise of his return. I opened the window, and the sweet fresh air rushed in; it seemed to have journeyed from afar, to bring a message, to tell me that he remembered. I looked up at the sky, it was soft and blue. "He must come back," I cried in pain and longing that could not wait in silence. My son's wife was beside me.

"He will never come," she said in her low and bitter voice, "he will never come—never."

"Why?" I asked.

"I cannot tell you," she answered, "but he will never come. I lied to him once, and I deceived him—do you think he will forgive?" She asked it half scoffingly; but as I turned to speak I saw that she was trembling, that on her face there was a look of pain and fear.

"He will never come again," she echoed, "till I am dead." She put out her cold hand as if to touch me, but drew back and moved away.

The days went by and the sun shone down on a green world again. There were flowers in the hedges and hidden in the woods. The birds sang of the spring that had come, of the summer that would soon sweep over the hills, touching all things with its gold. In the distance I could hear the song of the river as it hurried by rejoicing, overhead the swallows passed on their way to northern shores; and in the midst of all things there was the voice of a little child. It seemed so strange a sound in this sad house, as if the world had grown young again, and even my old heart leapt up and could have laughed for joy.

At last the strange woman my son had married seemed as though she could bear and be still no longer; her face softened, her voice changed, and one day, just for a moment, she let her head fall on my shoulder, as if to gain a moment's rest.

"Mother," she whispered—and before she had never said the word—"I want him back. If he could see the child, perhaps he would forgive me, and some day love me once again. I want his love—I want it now. I am hungry for it, longing for it, and he does not know. I shall die if he does not come; tell him that for me, and beg him to come back again. I lied to him, and he will not believe me now. But it was all a madness; I did not say one single word to the man I went all those miles to see that night. I stood and watched him pass, and came away unseen. It ended there. Your son knew that it did, though I had lied and schemed to go. It ended there; surely he will forgive me, and love me again, even though it is but a little, when he sees the child."

"But I do not understand," I said bewildered. The tears fell slowly down her face, as though her dull eyes grudged them; the lines about her mouth hardened again, as she answered, in a low, fierce voice—

"I cannot tell you more. It is his secret and mine; he will never tell you, neither will I. But if he forgives me—oh! if he would but forgive me. Entreat him to come back and see the child." She said the last words softly; she stole nearer to me. She had known how to be gentle once, but pain and grief had made her half afraid of all things in the world.

"Shall I tell him that you love him?" I asked.

She answered like a woman in a dream.

"Yes, tell him that all my thoughts turn to him; it is like going home to think of him. Only till he comes back the rooms of my dear home are empty; its fires burnt low, its gardens silent and deserted.



It seems as if I entered and waited for the master, thinking of the blessedness of seeing him again, and of the misery this longing will turn to if he delays. Yet I am thankful to love him, for there is rest and safety for me now, even though he stays from me, just as one feels safe and rested in one's own home, though none is there to bid one welcome. It is like thinking of heaven, remembering that one has walked through hell in past days, and found how it could burn and mock and crush. Ask him to come back once more ; if he would listen to me once, then he would understand. Entreat him to return." It was as though she had no other words to say but those few piteous ones, "Entreat him to return." But he did not come.

She fell ill at last with a long weary illness that only happiness could heal, and that would not come nigh her. Many a time she called me to her as she sat alone as in a dream.

"Mother," she said one day, "if I should die, and he comes back, tell him this—that I was never false to him. I did not love him, but I was true—save in my thoughts. I did not say one single word for the other man to hear, nor write one line for him to read. I lied and stole away that awful night just for one last moment to see that other one pass by. I hid, and watched, and listened; I heard his footsteps drawing near; I saw him pass, and when he had gone I stooped and kissed the ground over which his feet had trod—kissed it and put my face against the earth, and yet the love for him had gone long years before, and only loathing of his cowardice and treachery remained. But the man I knew would pass along the road that night when I stood there to watch had once taken my life and youth into his hands, and given them back no more. I did not steal out to meet a man I loved, or crouch to kiss *his* footsteps. It was the ghost of days that once had been—the ghost of my own youth, and all its sweetness, of my old life and all its promises, all its dreams that he had held and killed. They seemed to draw near once more when I saw him coming, they went farther and farther away into the hopeless distance as he I loathed passed on."

"And my son?"

"And your son had followed me. The man whom I went out to see went by not knowing—the man who had held my life. Your son came near as I rose from the ground I had kissed, and my tears fell fast. I was angry and bitter and miserable. For some strange reason I wanted to make another suffer as I had suffered, and the words I said burnt into his heart. I watched them do it, and was glad." She did not raise her head while she spoke, nor turn from the window by which she watched.

"And now?"

"I want him back," she said, in her even, monotonous voice. "I shall die if he does not come." I put out my hand to touch her, but she drew away, and almost shuddered. "Oh, no, no," she said, "I cannot bear it—I was not made for that. I cannot laugh and cry, and be caressed." She raised her head, and broke out again: "Tell him to come back, I want him so. I never loved him before he went—before the child was born, but I love him now. I am dying for him; I never had any other home nor any one I dared to trust who loved me truly. I want to hear him say that he forgives me, to rest my head down on his arm, as I used once to bear my misery and be silent, but would now to bear my happiness. Just once to see him, and then to die, if he could love me no more." She stopped speaking, but I could not reply. She was like a woman waiting to live or to die, but which I could not tell. There was great joy or terrible woe to come to her—I did not dare to wonder which, only I felt that her lips were not made for laughter, and for her eyes to light up with joy and happiness would have seemed a strange thing indeed.

Day after day she sat watching, with her face turned towards the copse, for ever watching, but never seeing him for whom she watched, till gradually there crept over her a pain that was despair. At last a messenger came over the long straight road across the hill. She saw him far enough away, and opening the window sat with a smile on her face at last.

"He is bringing news," she said, and her voice made me start, for it was the voice of a happy woman, not of the one who had doggedly watched so long. She took the letter from his hand with a cry of joy, and opened it with hands that trembled and could hardly hold the scrap of paper before her eager eyes. Then with a loud cry she told its contents.

"It is too late—too late, for he is dead!" and she fell forwards as the woman in the picture had fallen, only that for this poor soul there was no lover's heart to serve her as a pillow.

My son that was gone, that would never come back, my son that had been my babe and my little one, my joy and my pride, and was gone for ever, with never a soul he loved beside him, with never a tender voice to whisper to him or lips that loved him to kiss the dead lids over the tired eyes. An empty heart, an empty house, an empty world. My pretty boy whose voice was like the birds, my brave lad, my son a man of whom my heart was proud, for whom my whole life ached. And the end of it all for him, the end of it all for us—a still cold corpse. The sun shining, the birds singing, the green trees whispering, the busy world busying itself, the merry voices of the

young, the chattering of the old, and in the midst of it all—somewhere an empty room, a dead man.

Then once more they said she might be trusted to go about the house again. She seemed to have had some dream she could not remember, some blow in the dark that had staggered her and carried away her senses. She seldom spoke, but she would look up sometimes and say "When he comes back he will see the child." She said it with a voice that was not her own, and looked up with a face that had changed. It was as if her former self had left her,—had journeyed out to him. Sometimes I wonder if they have met, he and she that used to be; if they understand and all things are explained between them at last; or if the life that left her in those terrible weeks after the message came, though it has found him, will yet return, crying out in its agony "It is too late, too late."

The woman who rose from her bed sat and watched by the window again, for ever with her face turned towards the hill, till she forgot all else, till she did not let her eyes look down on her child's face, or remember to caress the little hand that touched her cheek. She did not know when it drooped and faded and slipped away from her arms. She saw them carry it across the grass to the burying-place beyond the firs, but she saw it with eyes that did not comprehend, and a heart that could not miss the little one who had gone.

There the story ends. Still she sits and watches, while her youth slips away, and round her the silence gathers deeper and deeper as it stretches back far into the distant past. Always the story is the same, always watching for one who never comes and never will come again. The seasons pass; the villagers over the hill laugh and weep and marry and die; to them life brings its changes, but to us all things are the same. Yet some day they say she will awake and know—ah! poor soul, God keep you from it.

I sit by the fire thinking. Only a little while and I too shall be gone; but the watcher by the window will know not and care not, for all things are the same to her. Life has left her but a single theme, a single thing, a single name to know. In fancy I can see her waiting alone in the vast still room that is full of strangest memories. And I wonder if when she goes to the crazy piano and sits in the twilight playing, I too shall return with the shadows, and with a ghostly company gaze in at that I once called home—if I too shall wait and listen while the fire burns low, but none is beside it, only a woman sits by the window playing, not to any human listeners, but to those who stand in an unseen world, the threshold of which is bounded by an everlasting silence.

## By One, by Two, and by Three.

### I.

It was while I was at Cambridge that I first came to know Angus Macbane. We met casually, as undergraduates do, at the breakfast-table of a mutual friend, or rather acquaintance; and I remember being struck with the odd cynical remarks my neighbour threw out at rare intervals, as he watched the argument we had started, about Heaven knows what or what not, and were maintaining on either side with the boundless confidence and almost boundless ignorance peculiar to freshmen. I seem to see him now, leaning back after the meal in a deep arm-chair, with his host's cat purring her contentment on his knee. He never looked at the semicircle of disputants round the fire, but blew beautiful rings of cigarette smoke into the air, or gazed with a critical expression, under half-shut lids, at the photographs of actresses forming a galaxy of popular beauty above the mantle-piece. Then he would emit some sentence, sometimes sensible, oftener wildly nonsensical; but always original, unexpected—a stone dropped with a splash and a ripple into the stream of conversation.

I do not think that he showed any very particular power of mind at the breakfast-party, or indeed afterwards. What made one notice him was the faint aroma of oddity that seemed to cling to him, and all his ways and doings. He was incalculable, indefinable; this was what made a good many dislike him, and made me, with one or two others, conceive a queer liking for him. I always had a taste, secret or confessed, for those delicate degrees of oddity which require a certain natural bent to appreciate them at all. Extravagance of any kind commands notice, and compels a choice between admiration and contempt; moreover, it generally (and not least at a University) invites imitation. No one ever either admired or despised Macbane, as far as I know; and no one could ever have imitated him. The singularity lay rather in the man himself than in any special habit. For Macbane was not definably different from other young men. He was of medium height, slightly made, but not spare; his face had hardly any colour, and his hair and moustache were light. His eyes were of

a tint difficult to define—sometimes they seemed blue, sometimes grey, sometimes greenish; and he had a trick of keeping them half-shut, and of looking away from any one who was with him. This peculiarity is popularly supposed to be the sign of a knave; in his case it was merely a part of the man's general oddity, and did not create any special distrust.

Our acquaintance, thus casually begun, ripened into a strange sort of friendship. Macbane and I saw very little of each other; we did not talk much, nor go for walks and rows together, nor confide to each other our doings and plans, as friends are supposed to do. On rainy afternoons I would stroll round to his rooms and enter, to find him generally seated before the fire, caressing his cat. We did not greet each other; but I generally took up one of the numerous strange and rare books that he contrived to accumulate, though he spent very little money. This I would read, occasionally dropping a remark which he would answer with some cynical, curt sentence; and then both of us relapsed into silence. Tea would be made and drunk, and we sometimes sat thus till dinner-time, or later. Yet though I always felt as if I bored Macbane, I still went to his rooms; and when I did not go for some time, he would generally, with an air of extreme lassitude and reluctance, come round to my quarters, there to sit and smoke and turn over my books in much the same way as I did when I visited him.

Angus Macbane never told me anything much about himself or his family; he was one of the most reticent of mortals. All he ever did in that way was to say once in an abrupt manner that some of his ancestors had been executed for witchcraft; and when I vented some of the usual commonplaces on the barbarous ignorance and cruelty of those times, he cut me short by remarking in a tone of profound conviction that he thought his ancestors thoroughly deserved their fate, and that their condemnation was the only oasis of justice in a desert of judicial infamy.

From other sources, however, I discovered that Angus Macbane was an only son, whose parents had both died soon after his birth, leaving nothing behind them but their child. An uncle, a rich Glasgow merchant, had provided in no very lavish way for the boy's education, and was supposed to be intending to leave him a large share of his property. This was all I gathered from those people who made a point of knowing everything about everybody; and there is no lack of them at Universities.

Two striking peculiarities there were about Macbane, which stood out from the general oddity of the man. The first was his fondness for cats, or, to speak more accurately, the fondness of



cats for him. He had always one pet cat—generally a black one—in his rooms, and sometimes more; and when he had two, they were invariably jealous of each other. But he seemed to have an irresistible attraction for cats in general: they would come to him uncalled, and show the greatest pleasure when he noticed or caressed them. He did not stroke a cat often, but when he did, it was with a certain delicate and sensitive action of the hand that seemed to delight the animal above everything. So marked was the attraction he exercised, that a scientific acquaintance accused him of carrying valerian in his pockets.

The other peculiarity was in his books. He had picked up, in ways only known to himself, a very fine collection of early works on demonology and witchcraft. A more complete account, from all sides, of "Satan's invisible world" was seldom accumulated. There were books, pamphlets and broadsheets in Latin, French, German, English, Italian and Spanish, and some old family manuscripts relating to the arts or trials of warlocks and witches. There was even an old Arabic manual of sorcery, though this I am sure he could not read. Most of these works were of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, since which period, indeed, civilisation has ordained a "close time" for witches; and any treatises on the black art dated after that time Macbane not only did not buy, but as a rule refused to accept as gifts. "Early in the eighteenth century," he once remarked, "men lost their faith in the devil; and they have not as yet recovered it sufficiently to produce any witchcraft worthy of the name." And indeed he had the greatest abhorrence and contempt for modern Spiritualism, mesmerism, esoteric Buddhism, &c.; and the only occasion during his Cambridge life on which I saw him really lose his temper was when a mild youth, destined to holy orders, called on him and asked him to join a society for investigating ghostly and occult phenomena. He turned on the intruder with something like ferocity, saying that he did not see why people wanted to be wiser than their ancestors, and that the old way of selling oneself to the devil, and getting the price duly paid, was far better both in its financial and moral aspects than paying foreign impostors to show the way to his place of business. "Though what the devil wants at all with such souls as yours," he added meditatively, "is the one point in his character that I have never been able to understand. It is a weakness on his part—I am afraid it is a weakness!" The incipient curate turned and fled.

A few sayings of this kind, reported and distorted in many little social circles, gave Angus Macbane an evil reputation which he hardly deserved. The College authorities looked askance

on him, and some of them, I believe, would have been thankful if his conduct had given them a pretext for "sending him down," whether for a term or for ever. But no offence or glaring irregularity could be even plausibly alleged against him. He attended the College chapel frequently, and never lost an opportunity of hearing the Athanasian Creed. "When I hear all those worthy people mumbling their sing-song formulas, without attaching any meaning to them, and chanting forth vague curses into the air," he once said to me, "I close my eyes, and can sometimes almost fancy myself on the Brocken, in the midst of the Witches' Sabbath."

This devout assiduity was only reckoned as one point more against him; for Angus Macbane belonged by birth to the very straitest of Scotch Presbyterians, and evinced no desire to quit them, or to dispute the harshest and most repulsive of the doctrines handed down from his ancestors. Yet to my knowledge he never went near any Presbyterian chapel, but preferred, as his worthy uncle said, "to bow in the house of Rimmon."

This uncle, as I gradually divined, was the one being whom my friend regarded with something like hatred. Mr. Duncan Macdonald was the brother of Macbane's mother. He was a big, red, sandy man, rich, unmarried, and not unkindly in nature; and an ordinary person with a little tact could have managed him, if not with complete satisfaction, at any rate to no small profit. It is true, the manufacturer was one of those self-made men who think that no man has any business to be otherwise than self-made; but by flattering his pride, he could easily have been induced to support his nephew in ease, and even in luxury and extravagance, if enough show were made for the money. But he was a Philistine of the Philistines, two-thirds of his life dominated by gain, and the rest by a rigid sense of duty. Material success and respectability were his two golden calves; and to both of these his nephew's every thought and act did dishonour. Angus Macbane could not have been made a successful man by any process less summary and complete than the creation of a world for his needs alone; and not even this would have given him respectability. He could not live without aid from his uncle; but he accepted from him a mere pittance, which, grudgingly taken, soon came to be as grudgingly given. Yet when he forced himself to compete for scholarships and prizes which would have made him partly independent, he missed them in a way which would have been wilful in any other man. His essays were a byword among examiners for their cynical originality, perverse ability, and instinctive avoidance of the obvious avenues to success. Thus he

was constrained to depend on that scanty income of which every coin seemed flung in his face. With his developed misanthropy and contempt for ordinary men, he would at all times have been intolerant of the mere existence of such a man as his uncle; and that he himself should be hopelessly indebted to such a creature for every morsel he ate, for every book he read, was a sheer monstrosity to his mind—or so I should conjecture from what I knew of the two. Angus seldom willingly mentioned his uncle; and when he did so, it was with a deadly intensity of contempt in his tone—not his words—such as I never heard before or since.

## II.

An end comes to all things; and my time at Cambridge, which had passed as swiftly for me as for most men, and left me with the usual abundant third year's crop of unfulfilled purposes, came to its end in due course. Angus Macbane had "gone down" before I did, with a high second-class degree in mathematics, chiefly gained, as I happened to hear from an examiner, by a very few problems which hardly any one else solved. A serious quarrel with his uncle followed on this ill-success; but from motives of family duty and respectability Mr. Macdonald continued to pay his nephew enough to maintain life. No relation of his, he felt, must come to the workhouse.

For a year or two I lost sight of Macbane; and when I saw him again, he was living in lodgings in an obscure street of a London suburb. I had learnt his address from another old college friend, Frank Standish by name, who had kept up relations with Angus. Frank was a complete contrast to Macbane; he was a tall, hearty, handsome, athletic fellow, successful in everything he undertook, and was now making his way as an engineer, and likely to do well. It was this opposition in their natures that had begotten their friendship. I have seen them sitting together at Cambridge, Standish chatting on by the hour, and Macbane watching him in contented silence. As some one remarked, it was like the famous friendship of a race-horse and a cat.

I was myself now an under-master at a large day-school, and my evenings were in general free; so one night I called for Standish at his lodging, and together we trudged off to find Macbane. Our path led through one of those strange uncanny wildernesses that lie about the outskirts of every great and growing town. Skeletons of unfinished houses, bristling with scaffolding poles, loomed on us at intervals through the rainy mist; the roads were long heaps of brickbats and loose stones, already varied

with blades of coarse grass. The path we followed was seamed across with the ruts of heavy carts that had gone to and from the half-built houses; and we stumbled over posts and through plasby pools, along the ghostly highway, completely deserted now that the workmen were gone, and stretching its miles of raw ruin through the autumn mist. Standish whistled cheerily as he strode on through the desolation, and I was comforted to have him with me—I think I should almost have felt afraid but for his presence. We crossed the No Man's Land of chaotic brick and mortar, and found ourselves in a street of mean new houses. At No. 21, Wolsley Road, Standish paused and rang; a slatternly maid-of-all-work answered the bell, and ushered us into the presence of Angus Macbane.

He was sitting by a poor little fire, in a shabby arm-chair, with his black cat on his knee as usual, and a volume of demonology in his hand; and, save that the room was small, cheaply furnished and hideously papered, and the occupant looked thinner and wearier, we could have fancied ourselves at Cambridge again. But after the first greetings, I soon noticed that Macbane was changed for the worse since I had seen him last. He did not seem at all dissipated, nor had he acquired the air of meanness and shiftiness that marks the needy adventurer; but there was a genuineness, almost a desperation, in his cynical utterances, which they had not had before—a hopelessness of expression and an irritability which I did not like. The misanthropy at which he had played before was now in grim earnest.

He told us a little—very little, and that reluctantly—of his own way of life. He was doing nothing of any moment—a struggling unknown writer, spasmodically trying to secure some literary foothold, and failing always, whether by the fatality which attended him specially, or by the same chances as befall any author. Added to this misery was the consciousness of his dependence on his uncle, which was bitterer to him, I could see, than ever. He began to talk about Mr. Macdonald of his own accord, and that was always a bad sign.

"Do you know," he said, with a bitter laugh, "my worthy relative is coming out here before long? He writes me that he is due in London on business in a fortnight or so, and will pay me a visit to see if I am still given over to the same reprobate mind as before, and opposed to what he calls my duty. Won't you come and see the fun, you two? I think I know how to aggravate him now, perfectly well. I assure you, at my last interview with him, I made him swear within three minutes—and he an elder!"

"I say, Macbane," Standish put in, in his good-natured way, "don't carry that game too far. The old chap is good for a lot if only you don't rub him up the wrong way. If you rile him this time, ten to one he cuts you off with a shilling—and then where will you be?"

"If he only would die!" Macbane went on, not seeming to hear his friend's remonstrance. "Fellows like that have no sense of fitness. When I saw him last he reminded me of one of those big fat coarse speckled spiders, that you want to kill, only they make such a mess. I should so like to murder him, if I could do it by deputy."

He was joking, of course, but there was more earnestness than I liked in his manner. I looked at Standish, and he at me, before I spoke.

"If those are your sentiments," I said, echoing his light tone, "we had better come to prevent bloodshed."

"Yes, do come," Angus resumed; "and if you will kindly take off his head outside, I shall be greatly obliged to you. Bring a delightful rusty old axe, Standish, with plenty of notches in the blade. It will be so nice to be like one of those dear Italian despots, and get one's assassination done for one. Though there are better than hiring a bravo, even. An ancestor of mine——" and here he stopped suddenly.

"Well, what did your ancestor do?" asked I.

"Oh," said Macbane coolly, "he raised a devil of some sort and got scragged by it himself."

As he spoke these trivial words, there came a faint sound at the door as of something scratching very gently on the panel. I turned to Macbane and asked—

"Is that your dog, Mac?"

"My dog!" he said with a shudder, "why, I *hate* dogs. I never have one near my room by any chance—except when the landlady sends me up sausages."

"Perhaps it is another cat come to make friends with you," suggested Standish. "There it is again. I will let it in, whatever it is."

He flung the door open, and the chill air rushed in from the draughty passage and stairs. There was nothing outside or in sight, and he shut the door again with a bang.

"I heard it distinctly," he said, in the aggrieved tone of one who fancies he has made himself ridiculous. "What could it have been?"

"Wind, perhaps, or a rat," said Macbane lightly. "There are plenty of rats in the place, and I am glad of it, for it is the only



thing that prevents me from expecting the house to fall every moment. When it is going to fall the rats will all run out, and my cat Mephistopheles will run out after them, and I shall run out after Mephistopheles; and the landlady and the first-floor lodgers, and the landlady's cat that eats my tea and sugar, will all be squelched together, to the joy of all good cats and men—eh, Mephisto? Why, what ails the cat?"

For Mephistopheles was standing upon his master's lap, with back arched and tail rigid and bristling, glaring into the darkest corner of the little room, and hissing in a passion of mingled rage and fear. Then, before any one could stop him, the cat made one leap at the window, with a yell and a great crash of glass, and was gone, leaving us staring at each other.

Angus Macbane spoke first, with a forced laugh.

"There goes my cat," he said, "and there goes one-and-nine for broken glass. Cats I may get again, but one-and-ninepence—never. A cat with nine lives, a shilling with nine pence—all lost, all lost!"—and he went on laughing in a shrill hysterical way that I did not at all like. During the pause that followed, Standish looked at his watch.

"It is pretty late now," he said, "and I have a lot of working drawings to prepare to-morrow. Good-night, Macbane. If I come across your cat, I'll remonstrate with him for quitting us so rudely. But no doubt he will come back of himself."

As Standish said this, the rest of the large pane through which the cat had leaped suddenly fell out with a startling crash into the street, making us all wince.

"It was cracked already," remarked Angus; "and the glazier does not allow for the pieces. Good-night, both of you. I fancy I have something to do myself, too."

I was surprised, and a little hurt, at being thus practically turned out by my friend (for I had expressed no intention of departing, and it was not really very late); but I was not sorry to go now, and have the solace of Standish's cheery company home. A curious undefined feeling of apprehension was creeping over me, and I wanted to be out in the night air, and shake off my uneasiness by a brisk walk.

We went downstairs, leaving Macbane brooding in his chair. As the landlady saw us out, I slipped a half-crown into her hand.

"Mr. Macbane's window got broken to-night," I said. "Will you have it mended, and not say anything about it to him?"

I knew that he would probably forget the occurrence if not reminded of it. Standish nodded approval, and we went out into the mist. We walked on in silence till we turned out of the

lamp-lit and inhabited part, and then my companion remarked abruptly—

"That makes one-and-threepence I owe you, Eliot"—and relapsed into silence, not even whistling as he strode along.

We had reached nearly the middle of the long artificial desert, where a street was some day to be, when Standish stopped and caught me by the arm.

"Eliot, what is that?" he whispered.

We both stood still and listened. From the waste land beyond one of the skeleton houses came a fearful cry, whether of a child or an animal we could not tell—a scream of mere pain and terror, intense and thrilling, neither human nor bestial. Then there was a deep snarling growl, and the yell died into a choking gurgle, and suddenly fell silent.

"Come on," Standish gasped, and ran with all his speed in the direction of the sound.

I followed as fast as my shorter legs and wind would take me over the stiff slimy clay of the waste land, and after a few minutes found him bending over a little dark heap on the ground at the edge of a puddle.

"Have you got a match?" he said.

I nodded—I was too much out of breath to speak—and pulled out my match-box. I struck a light, screening it with my hand, and we both looked earnestly at the black lump at our feet.

"Bah!" said Standish, as he mopped the perspiration from his face. "Why, it's only a cat, and it sounded like a baby!"

It was the body of a large black cat, still warm and quivering, but quite dead. The throat was almost entirely severed, and the blood had streamed out, darkly streaking the thick yellow water of the pool. Of what had killed it there was no sign or sound, only, in the soft clay beside the puddle, there were marks which seemed those of the poor cat's feet, and other footprints like these, but larger. I pointed them out to Standish.

"I see what it was," he said, as we trudged laboriously back to the road. "The cat was out there, and some beast of a dog caught it and killed it—though what cat or dog should be doing there is more than I can say. What teeth the brute must have! Ugh! I hope he's not waiting round to take another bite!"

We got back to the road unbitten, and went on our way in silence, till I said—

"Standish, do you know, that cat was very like Macbane's?"

"Do you know, Eliot," was his answer, "that is just what I was going to tell you?"

And not another word did he utter, till I left him at his door and said good-night.

## III.

MACBANE was never a good correspondent, but he duly informed us of the date of his uncle's expected visit; and when the day came, I called for Standish in the evening as before, and we trudged off through another sloppy mist. Standish, good thoughtful fellow, had brought with him, in his overcoat pocket, a bottle of very fine old Irish whiskey, which he had long been treasuring up for some festal occasion, but now intended to devote to the mollifying, if possible, of Mr. Macdonald.

"Every glass he takes of this," he solemnly assured me as we went on, "will be worth a hundred a year to Macbane."

We did not go by the same dreary road that we had taken before. Frank declared, with a shudder, that the last cry of that cat was still ringing in his ears, and that he could not stand the ghastly place again. I was rather surprised at his unwonted nervousness, but readily acquiesced in it. So we went a mile or so out of our way, keeping along endless streets of shabby-genteel houses, which were sufficiently hideous, but not appalling; and about nine in the evening we reached Wolsley Road.

I was surprised and almost shocked to notice the change that had passed over Macbane in the few weeks since I had seen him last. He did not seem worse in health—on the contrary, there was at times a nervous alacrity about his movements which I had not remarked before. But his face and expression seemed to have darkened, as it were, and grown evil. His college cynicism had already turned into misanthropy; and now, I thought, it had developed into a positive malevolence. He still was silent and brooding, after the first greetings; but he no longer seemed dejected. Altogether a transformation of some kind had come to him, such that I—though not very impressionable—was rather inclined to fear than to pity him.

The conversation, as was natural, turned on the uncle, who might appear at any moment now. Standish and I joined in urging on our friend the necessity of attempting conciliation, of showing some semblance of submission. We had more than once induced him to do so before, though his perverse temper generally made him unable to do more than avert an instant stoppage of the supplies; but to-night he was obstinate, and even spoke as if he were the aggrieved party, and his uncle the one to make advances.

"If the old fool cares to be civil," he said fiercely, "then there's an end of it; and if not, there's an end too. I am tired of humouring him."

As he spoke, the "old fool's" heavy tread was heard on the stairs, and in another minute he entered. He was a big, strong, red-faced, coarse-looking fellow, with sandy whiskers and grizzled hair, who nodded awkwardly to us, and gave a surly greeting to his nephew, who sat still in his arm-chair, looking into the fire with half-shut eyes.

Mr. Duncan Macdonald seemed disconcerted by our presence, and I offered to withdraw; but Macbane would not let us.

"You see, uncle," he remarked, still keeping his eyes averted, and using the familiar title solely, I am convinced, because he knew the uncle did not like it, "these gentlemen know all about our little affairs, and they had better hear your version of matters now than my version afterwards. Besides, one of them is going to be a literary man, and write a tale with Scotch characters in it; and you will be quite a godsend for him, as raw material for a study. If you want to swear at me, pray don't mind him; there is nothing that tells more in literature than a little aboriginal profanity, properly accented."

This was a bad beginning for an interview; and would have been worse still had Mr. Macdonald been able fully to understand his nephew's speech. What he did understand, however, obviously offended him; and he began to address Macbane in no very conciliatory tones, though at first with a forced moderation of language and strained English accent which were evidently the result of the young man's taunt. Then, as Macbane did not answer, but sat still looking into the fire, his uncle began to lose temper. His language grew broader and stronger, both as Scotch and as reproach. He addressed us with a sort of rough eloquence on the subject of his nephew's miserable laziness, shiftlessness, effeminacy—pointing at him, and showering down vigorous epithets on him. In the midst of his tirade, as he paused for breath, came a low sound of scratching at the door.

"There's that confounded rat again!" cried Standish, glad of any pretext for interrupting the miserable business. "Dead, for a ducat, this time!" He dashed open the door as he spoke, but there was nothing to be seen. Only the gaslight in the passage, flickering and flaring in the draught, sent strange shadows flitting across the walls.

Frank came back and sat down, and busied himself in uncorking his bottle of whiskey, and setting the kettle on to boil. I took up a book, so as not to seem to observe a scene which I knew must be so painful and humiliating for Macbane. The uncle again plunged into the stream of his invective, and I kept my eyes on the nephew. I knew that he was really quite as

passionate as the elder man, and I was afraid of what he might do if he once lost his self-control; but though a little shiver passed over him sometimes, he was quite silent, leaning back in the arm-chair, with his head resting on his right hand, and his left arm hanging listlessly over the side of the chair. Presently he began to move the hands languidly to and fro, with the fingers outstretched, and the palm horizontal and slightly hollowed, keeping it more than a foot from the carpet. It was a curious gesture, but he had many odd tricks of the kind.

At last Mr. Macdonald, having spent his store of abuse without any response, began, I fancy, to feel a little ashamed of himself, and became more conciliatory, letting fall some hints as to the terms on which he might even yet receive his prodigal nephew back to favour. The manner of his overtures was far more offensive than their substance, and to one who could make allowance for the man's coarse nature, there was even a trace of a feeling that might be called kindness. But Macbane was always far more sensitive to externals than other men, and his uncle's condescension, I could see, irritated him far more than his anger. He left off moving his hand to and fro, sat up and clutched the arms of his chair. Then, when the older man had done, he cast one deadly look at him, and shook his head as if he would not trust himself to speak.

"Winna ye speak, ye feckless pauper loon?" roared his uncle, with a string of oaths.

Macbane was silent, but that good fellow Standish interposed at what he thought was the right moment.

"Come, Mr. Macdonald," he said frankly, "I don't think you should talk like that. After all, Macbane is your own sister's son, and he is not well now, and you must not come down on him too heavily. Let us have a glass of toddy all round now and part friends, and we three will talk it all over, and make matters smooth to-morrow. We can't do any good to-night."

As he spoke, he got out some tumblers from the cupboard and wiped them clean. The Glasgow manufacturer seemed a little mollified; nobody could help liking Standish or his whiskey, and all might yet have been well if the devil had not seemed to enter suddenly into Angus Macbane. Standish had poured out a generous measure of the fragrant spirit, and was turning to take the kettle off the hob, when Macbane sprang up like a cat, in a white heat of rage, took the tumbler from the table and flung it right into the grate. The glass rang and crashed, and the flame leapt out blue like a tongue of hell-fire; and Angus stood at the table, quivering all over, with his right hand opening and shutting as if feeling



for a weapon. Standish caught him by the arm and pulled him back into his chair.

"Are you mad, Mac?" he exclaimed. Macbane did not seem to hear, but sat glowering at his uncle. As for Mr. Duncan Macdonald, he turned purple with anger. The complicated atrocity of the insult—an outrage at once on kinship, hospitality, thrift and good whiskey—had smitten him dumb for a moment with surprise and rage. He clenched his fist and struck blindly at his nephew, who was fortunately out of reach; then he spoke in a husky but distinct voice, slowly, as if registering a vow.

"De'il throttle me," he said, "if ever you see bawbee of mine again." And he took up his hat and umbrella and turned to the door.

"Done with you, in the devil's name!" cried Macbane.

Without another word the uncle flung the door open, and shut it after him with a crash that shook the house. Then we heard him heavily stamping down the stairs and along the passage, till another great bang proclaimed that he had left the house. This last noise seemed to rouse Macbane from a sort of trance. He sprang up again and rushed to the door and threw it open, as if to pursue his uncle. We were going to stop him, for he looked murderous enough; but instead of dashing downstairs, he stopped, flung out his hand with a strange gesture, as if he were pointing at something, and muttered a few words that I could not catch. Then he shut the door and came back slowly to his old seat, as pale as a dead man.

In the excitement of the scene, we had none of us noticed the time; but now the cheap little clock on the mantelpiece struck twelve, and recalled the fact that two of us were far away from our lodgings. Standish and I looked at each other; we neither of us liked to leave Macbane alone yet. The man's expression as he flung the glass into the fire—still more his look as he pointed down the stairs—was black enough for anything; and if we went now, he seemed quite capable of going out and murdering his uncle, or staying and murdering himself. Standish winked at me, and went out quietly. In ten minutes he came back and addressed Macbane, who was sunk in one of his reveries again.

"All right, old fellow," he said cheerily, "your landlady tells me her first floor is vacant, and she will put us two up for the night. So cheer up, Mac. It is a bad business, but we will see you through it, never fear. Now let's brew some punch and be jolly to-night at any rate, as we needn't go."

Macbane woke up again at this, with a sudden feverish gaiety. He eagerly took the steaming tumbler Frank prepared for him,

and drained it at a draught—he whose strongest stimulant was coffee. The whiskey did not seem to affect his head, however. More than this, he hunted out a soiled pack of cards from an obscure drawer, and proposed—he who hated all games—that we should play to pass the time. Dummy whist he thought too slow, and I proposed three-handed euchre, generally called “cut-throat.” The name seemed to amuse our friend vastly. He insisted on learning the game, and we started at once. His spirits were almost uproarious; I had never seen him like this before. Yet his gaiety was very unequal. Sometimes he would cut the wildest jokes, till in spite of our uneasiness about him we shrieked with laughter; and again he would sink back in his chair, forgetting to play his hand, and seeming as if he listened for some sound. After some time he went to the door and flung it open, declaring that he was “stifling in this hole of a room.” Then he sat down again to play, but fidgeted about in his chair impatiently. He was studying his cards, which he held up in his left hand, when I happened to look at the other arm hanging down by his chair.

“For goodness sake!” I exclaimed, “what have you done to your hand, Macbane?”

He held up his right hand as I spoke, and looked at it. Palm and fingers were dabbled and smeared with watery blood, fresh and wet. For a moment we stared at each other with pale faces.

“I must have cut my hand over that confounded tumbler or something,” said Macbane at last with an evident effort. “I will go and wash it off in my bedroom and be back in a moment.”

He slipped out as he spoke, and we heard him washing his hand, muttering to himself all the time.

Then in a few minutes he came back, keeping his hand in his pocket, and resumed the game. But his former high spirits were gone, and another tumbler of punch failed to recall them. He made constant mistakes, played his hand at random, and at last suddenly threw all his cards down on the table, laid his head on them, and burst into a terrible fit of hysterical sobbing.

We did not know what to do with him, but Standish laid him on the hard sofa, and in a little time he seemed better, though greatly shaken, and managed to control himself. He thanked us in a whisper, and told us to go, and he would get to bed alone. We were still rather anxious about him, but there seemed no reason for staying with him now against his will. The natural reaction had followed on all the strain and excitement, and I, for one, was glad that it was no worse. So we left him beginning, in a slow and dazed way, to get to bed, and descended to try and snatch a little sleep in the genteel misery of the first-floor lodgings.

## IV.

We passed a rather disturbed night in our strange quarters. There were rats in the walls, the windows rattled, and altogether there were more queer noises than one generally hears in houses so new. However, we did get to sleep, and did not wake again till the grey dull sodden dawn was making ghastly the little strip of sky visible over the grimy roof of the house opposite. We rose and dressed quickly and went up to Macbane's room. I peered in, but he was still sleeping heavily; so we busied ourselves, as quietly as we could, in preparing breakfast, intending, if our friend did not wake, to go off to our own work for the day, leaving a message for him. We purposed, in a rather vague manner, to do something for poor Macbane. Standish hoped to work on the better feelings of his uncle; I had resolved to devote some of my little savings to keeping my friend out of the workhouse.

We were half through our scanty and silent meal, when a heavy tread was heard on the stairs, making apparently for the room where we were. "What luck!" said the sanguine Standish; "here's the penitent uncle, come back after the whiskey. Now leave me alone to manage him. There is half the bottle left."

The steps came up to the door and paused: then there was a single sharp rap, and in walked—not Mr. Macdonald, but a policeman. If Standish and I had been thieves or coiners taken in the act, we could hardly have shown more confusion. My first thought was that perhaps Macbane had done something wrong; and this suspicion was confirmed by the officer's first words.

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said; "but is either of you Mr. A. Macbane?"

"No," said Standish; "Mr. Macbane is asleep in the next room. What do you want with him?"

"I want him to come with me to the station, as soon as convenient, sir," was the reply.

"What for?" persisted Standish. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Nothing wrong about him; leastways, I don't suppose so, sir," said the man. "But there's been foul play somewhere. There's been a body found in the road out a mile off, and a card in the pocket with Mr. Macbane's name and address on it; and we want him to come and identify the corpse."

"Do you know the man's name?" I demanded, divining, as I asked, what the answer would be.

"His linen was marked 'Macdonald,' sir," was the cautious reply.

"And how had he been killed?" asked Standish breathlessly.

"Throat cut from ear to ear," said the constable, with terrible conciseness.

We looked at each other, and shuddered. Neither of us had any kind feelings for the man thus suddenly cut off; in fact, we had been thoroughly disgusted with his coarse and sordid temper, and had hoped—in jest, it is true—that he might break his neck over the dismal road he had to traverse. But this sudden, mysterious, hideous murder—for such it must be—struck us with a chill of horror. My first collected thought, I believe, was a feeling of intense thankfulness that we had not left Macbane alone the night before. Now, at any rate, no suspicion could attach to him.

The policeman looked curiously from one to the other of us.

"Perhaps," he said at length, "one of you two gentlemen would know him?"

"If it is the man I suppose," answered Standish, "we certainly do know him. Mr. Macdonald is Mr. Macbane's uncle, and was here last night. We both saw him leave before twelve o'clock, and have not seen him since."

"Then, sir," said the policeman, "perhaps one of you will wake Mr. Macbane and bring him along as soon as he can come, and the other will go to the station at once, for there is never any time to lose in these cases."

I went into Macbane's bedroom, and Standish took up his hat and followed the policeman out. I touched my friend on the shoulder. He gasped, yawned, then sat up, rubbed his eyes, and stared wildly round him, till his gaze rested on me. Then the recollection of what had happened seemed to come back on him in a flash, and he laid his head back on the pillow.

"Is that you, Eliot?" he said. "I have had such a horrible dream. Thank you for waking me. Must I get up now?"

"Yes, you must, Macbane," I replied gravely. "I will tell you why afterwards."

"Moralities and mysteries!" said he, in his cynical way. "Well, I shall soon hear, if I am a good boy, and don't take long over my dressing. Reach me my trousers, there's a good fellow."

As I did so, I saw that his right hand was again streaked thinly with dried blood, and I could not help an exclamation.

"Ah!" said he, as I called his attention to it. "That thing has been bleeding again, I see. Well, I can soon wash it off." And he sprang up in his nightshirt, and ran to his washstand.

"Look here!" he cried, as he plunged his hand into the water;

"shouldn't I make a lovely Lady Macbeth? 'Here's the smell of the blood yet. Oh! oh! oh! All the perfumes of Araby—' How does it go? 'Yet who would have thought the old man had so much blood in him?'"

"For God's sake, be quiet!" I screamed. "Your uncle is lying at the police-station with his throat cut! Be thankful you had nothing to do with killing him!"

Macbane turned faint and sick, and sat down on his bed again; but he bore the news much better than I had thought he would. To be sure, he had no love for his uncle, and could not be expected to sorrow for him; but the shock did not seem somehow to affect him greatly, except by a mere physical repulsion at the horrid manner of his uncle's death. He soon got up again, and went on dressing, listening meanwhile as I told him all I yet knew about the matter; and as soon as he was ready, we went out together.

The police-station was soon reached, and we were admitted into a back room where Mr. Macdonald's body lay on a table, covered with a piece of sacking. There was no difficulty in identifying the corpse. The throat was cut, or rather, as it seemed to me, torn almost through with a frightful wound; but the face was uninjured, and still bore an expression of sudden horror and surprise that was very ghastly. We did not care to look on the sight long. When the covering had been replaced, the constables told us all they knew. Some workmen, coming to their work at one of the unfinished houses in the new road, had found the body, lying on its back in a pool of clotted blood. There were no marks of a struggle that they noticed. They had put the corpse on a short ladder left in one of the houses, and carried it to the police-station. The nearest surgeon had been called in, and had pronounced that life had been extinct for some hours. A purse and gold watch were found in the pockets. As to the hand or the weapon that had done the deed, neither the surgeon nor the police would offer any suggestion; and we could not help them. Only, as we left the station, the police-sergeant remarked that he thought he had a clue to the murderer. "Do you hear that, Standish?" said Macbane in a mocking tone; "he thinks he has a clue."

We walked back to Wolsley Road and left Macbane there; and then Standish and I trudged off to our work—for work must be done, whoever has died. And all that afternoon and evening, whenever I was within sight or sound of a main street, my eyes were greeted with sensational placards, and my ears deafened with the shouts of newsboys, reiterating the same burden—"Third Edition! Awful Murder in Craddock Park! A Glasgow



Merchant Murdered!" and over every placard I seemed to see the vision of the dead face, and that gash in the throat.

The inquest was held a few days afterwards, and of course we all attended it. The story of the quarrel with Angus Macbane came out, in its main outlines, from his evidence and ours; and I could tell from the Coroner's pointed questions, that he suspected our friend. But there was no reasonable doubt that Duncan Macdonald had been killed within an hour after he left the lodging-house; and it was perfectly clear from our evidence and the landlady's that Angus Macbane had been in his room long after this, and practically certain that he had never left the house at all that night. The medical evidence, when it came, was conclusive; the distinguished surgeon who had made the post-mortem examination gave it as his opinion that the wound in the throat could have been inflicted with no species of weapon with which he was acquainted; and as far as he could venture to form a hypothesis, death had been caused by the bite of some animal armed with exceedingly large and powerful cutting teeth. This unexpected statement caused quite a sensation in court; and Standish jumped up. "By Jove, I forgot the cat!" he said to me; and then, advancing to the Coroner, he informed him that he had an addition to make to his former statement. He was sworn again, and told the story of the mysterious death of poor Mephistopheles in a straightforward way that evidently impressed the jury. I confirmed his tale in every particular.

There were no more witnesses, and the Coroner summed up. He began by stating that all the evidence that could be collected still left this terrible affair in a very mysterious state. So far as he could see, however, there was happily no reason for regarding it as a murder. There had been no robbery of the body, though robbery would have been perfectly easy; and though there might have seemed some *prima facie* grounds for suspecting one person of complicity in the act—here the worthy Coroner glanced at Macbane, who smiled slightly—yet it had been proved by reputable witnesses, whose testimony had not been impugned (here Standish blushed, and I think I did, too), that the person in question could not possibly have been present on the scene of Mr. Macdonald's death at the hour when it took place, and had apparently confined the expression of his ill-will to mere words, which it would be unfair to invest with any special significance—and so on, in the usual moralising vein of coroners. The medical evidence, he went on to say, pointed to the theory that the death of the deceased was caused by some savage animal; and the further statement of two of the witnesses seemed to indicate

that some such ferocious beast, perhaps a dog, was loose in the neighbourhood. It would be for the jury, however, to review all the facts, and return a just and impartial verdict upon the case.

The jury deliberated for some time, and finally determined that the deceased died from the bite of some savage animal, but what animal they were unable to say. A rider to the verdict directed the police to use all possible diligence to track out and destroy so dangerous a beast, and suggested that a reward should be offered for its capture or death. This was done by the local authorities, but with no result; and as weeks went on, and no fresh victim fell to the "ravenous beast or beasts unknown," men ceased to go armed, or to apprehend attacks, and the Craddock Park Mystery was forgotten.

Mr. Duncan Macdonald had left no will; and though he had torn up a testament providing for his nephew, he had not yet executed his threat of disinheriting him. So Macbane, as the only near relative, came in for the manufacturer's very considerable fortune. He sold out his uncle's share in his business, and his first act, almost, was to purchase an old, half-ruinous place, called Dullas Tower, which had been (as I gathered from the scanty letter he wrote me about it) the ancestral seat of the Macbanes before the family fell into poverty and ill repute in the old witchcraft days.

I was prevented by my school duties from seeing Macbane, now that he had gone north; and about this time Standish got a good appointment on an Indian railway in course of construction, and had to sail at once. Thus we three friends were parted for long, and it might be for ever. I was sorry enough to lose Standish; I think it was rather a relief to see no more of Macbane. He was stranger than ever, now that his sudden prosperity had come upon him—alternately gay and sullen, exalted and depressed, and disquieting enough in either mood. I occasionally sent him a line, and at still rarer intervals received an answer; but, on the whole, I thought he had dropped out of my life permanently, and I was not sorry to have it so, now that he needed no help. I did not dream of the strange way in which we were once again to be brought together.

## V.

It was some months after Standish had left for India, and I had already received one letter from him, when I was startled by a brief paragraph among the Indian telegrams in the *Times*. It ran thus—"I regret to state that Mr. F. Standish, the young and

talented engineer superintending the construction of the Salampore Junction Railway, has been killed, it is supposed by a tiger." This was all—terribly simple, brief and direct, as messages of evil are now. I was greatly shocked and grieved at this sudden death of my old friend; for though I was not likely to see him again for many years, and college friendships fade sadly when college life is over, yet we had been much together before he left, and my remembrance of him was still warm and affectionate. As soon as I recovered from the blow of the news, I wrote at once to Lieutenant Johnson, a young officer whom Standish had mentioned as being stationed near his quarters, and as being an acquaintance of his, to ask for some particulars of my friend's death.

The answer was forwarded to me about the end of August. I was not at the time in London, but had been invited by an old friend of my family to stay with him and have some shooting (though this was mere pretence on my part) at his place in Yorkshire. Lieutenant Johnson's letter was sent on from my lodgings to Darton Manor, where I was. It was a good letter, showing in its tone of manly regret how familiar and dear Standish had grown in the short time of intercourse with his new neighbours; but what I turned to most eagerly was of course the account of my poor friend's death. It was brief and rather mysterious. Standish had gone out for an early walk in the cool of the morning, taking his gun with him, as was his custom. He had walked along the line of the new railway a little distance, and then turned off into the country. As he did not come back at his usual time, two of his servants had gone out to look for him, and found him lying on his back in a path, quite dead. His throat was fearfully torn, but there was no other wound on him. There had been no struggle, and the gun was still loaded. Footprints of some animal were observed in a patch of soft ground near by, but it was not certain whether this was the beast that had killed Standish; for while the footmarks were like those of a small panther, the wound seemed rather as if inflicted by the teeth of a tiger. A large hunting-party had beaten the neighbouring country without finding any dangerous wild animal.

This narrative set me on a very gloomy train of thought. The details of Standish's end were horribly like those of Mr. Duncan Macdonald's—the suddenness, the stealth, the mystery, the ferocity of the attack were the same in both cases. Yet, what possible connection could there be between the Craddock Park mystery and the death of an engineer on the Salampore railway? Still, I could not keep this haunting feeling of some impending doom from shadowing my mind. Four men had met in that

little room in Wolseley Road on that memorable night in November; two of the four had already perished by the same mysterious and horrible death. Was it possible that the same end was reserved for the other two, and, if so, who would be the next victim? It was a wild idea, I felt; but I simply could not get it out of my head, and it made me very gloomy and depressed at the dinner-table that night.

My kindly old host noticed this, and his genial nature could not rest satisfied till all around him were as cheery as himself. So when our *tête-à-tête* dinner was done—we had been very late in dining that day—he resolved to have up a bottle of a certain very rare old wine, which he kept under special lock and key for great occasions. This precious liquor he was now resolved to devote to clearing away my melancholy.

He would never trust a butler with the key of his cellar—least of all would he let a servant touch this priceless vintage. He was going to fetch the bottle himself, but of course I interposed and insisted on going for him. With a sigh of resignation, he gave me his bunch of cellar-keys, carefully instructing me as to their particular uses, and the treasures to which they respectively gave access. Then he dismissed me, and I went down to the cellar.

The cellar of Darton Manor was far older than the house. It was hewn out of the rock on which the hall stood, and was large and lofty. I think that when the old castle, whose walls are still to be traced in the Manor garden, was standing, the vaults beneath must have been the storehouse of the garrison. When the modern house was built, two windows were cut up through the rock to give light to the cellars; but the present owner had protected these openings with double gratings, and put an iron-plated door, with a strong and cunning lock, to defend his precious wines.

I took up a candle, lit it, and went down the winding stair that led to the cellar. The vault below was so lofty and so far beneath the floor of the hall, that the staircase, cut in the rock, seemed as if it would never end; I felt like one descending into a sepulchre. The clash of the keys swinging from my hand was the only sound in the chilly silence, except when noises came, muffled and faint, from the house above. At last I reached the heavy door of the cellar, and, with some labour, unlocked it and swung it back. Then I drew out the key, as I wanted another on the bunch for releasing the precious bottle I had been sent to fetch. For a moment I stood in the doorway, holding my light high, and gazing round me into the great cavernous room. I could not see

all of it; but the long rows of casks and the racks of bottles were very impressive in their silent array of potential conviviality. Then I glanced up at the windows, whose gratings were now and then made visible by a flicker of summer lightning across the sky; and as I did so, I suddenly heard a crash as of glass, far up in the house above. Then, as I still listened, came a faint sound of footfalls rapidly growing louder, as if something was coming down the winding stair with long leaps.

I did not stop to face whatever this might be; I did not pause to think what I should do. In a blind and fortunate impulse of overpowering terror, I flung the heavy door to, plunged the key into the lock and shot the bolt home. How I managed to do it in the one instant left to me, I never could understand; I had found the door hard enough to open before. As I gave the key a last turn, something came against the iron outside with a thud that almost shook the hinges loose. Then there was a moment of quiet, and I, listening behind the door, could catch a quick, hoarse, heavy panting, as of some beast of prey. Then came another great shock, and another; and at every blow the good door creaked and shook, but held firm. Next there was a grating, rending sound, as if teeth and claws were tearing at this last obstacle between my life and its destroyer—and still I stood silent, transfixed with horror, as in a nightmare, expecting to feel the fangs of the unseen Thing close through my throat. How long I stood thus, tasting all the bitterness of death, I cannot tell. It was years in agony—it may have been only minutes of time. To feel that something fiendish, brutal and merciless was slowly tearing its way to me, and to know nothing of It save that It was death, this was the deadly and overmastering terror. My trance cannot have lasted long. With a start, I awoke to the consciousness that life was still mine, and that a chance of escape yet remained. The frozen blood again coursed through my veins, and my dead courage revived. I sprang to the nearest large barrel that lay on its side and rolled it close against the door, to keep the panels from giving way. Then I took up an iron bar that I found lying on the floor—perhaps a lever for moving the casks—and stood ready to give one last blow for my life. The sound of tearing ceased; I heard one deep snarling growl of disappointed rage; and then the quick steps seemed to recede up the stair. I stood there delivered, for a moment.

Only for a moment, however. My candle, which was a mere stump, suddenly flared, flickered and left me in total darkness, made darker by the little patch of sky seen through the nearer window, across which still ran an occasional flicker of summer



lightning. In trying to strike a light, I dropped the match-box on the rock floor. While I was groping for it, I suddenly looked up and saw two eyes.

Two eyes, I say, but they were rather two flames, or two burning coals. For a moment I stood glaring, fascinated, at the orbs that glared into mine. Then, as the Thing turned what seemed its head, and the eyes were averted for a moment, I saw, or thought I saw, a dim phosphorescent mass obscuring the faint light of the window. Then the eyes were on me again, and I heard the sound of tearing and wrenching at the outer grating—for there were two, one above the window and one inside. The outer bars were old and rusty—strong enough to resist any common shocks, but not to hold against the unknown might that was rending at them. I heard them creaking, cracking, and then—oh heaven! the whole grating gave way, and I heard it ring as it was hurled aloft and fell far out on the stones. Next instant the strong glass of the window flew in shivers on the floor—and there were those awful eyes looking into mine now, with only a few bars between us. Then the wrenching began once more at the last barrier. It bent—it shifted—I thought it was giving way, and in a frenzy I rushed forward, whirling the iron bar round my head, and struck with all my force through the grating. Another horrible growl answered the blow, and the bar was seized and dragged from my grasp. It was found next day, deeply indented, on the ground, a hundred yards away.

But now that the prey seemed given over disarmed to its teeth, the devilish fury of the Thing seemed to triumph over the devilish cunning that had directed it. It gave up the persistent assault on the grating, and writhed against the bars in a transport of hissing rage, biting the air, grinding its jaws on the tough iron. And yet—this was the horror of it—I could see nothing distinctly—only a phosphorescent shadow, twisted and tortured with agonies of rage, and turning upon me sometimes those eyes which seemed to redden with the growing frenzy of the Thing, till they were like blood-red lamps. I think I had lost all fear for my life now. I did not think of danger or resistance; but so mighty was the sheer horror of that bestial rage, that I grovelled down in the darkest corner of the vault, and hid my eyes and stopped my ears, and cried to Heaven to deliver me from the presence of the Thing.

Suddenly, as I crouched there, the end came. The noise ceased. I turned and saw that the eyes were gone. I stood up and stretched out my arms, and a cool air blew through the shattered window on my streaming forehead. Then every tense

fibre of my body seemed to give way, and I fell like one dead on the floor.

I was wakened from my swoon by a thundering at the door, and the sound of voices—human voices once more. I staggered to the door, pushed away the cask, and after long wrenching—for my hands seemed to have lost all strength—got the lock open, and stumbled into the arms of my good host. Above him, on the stairs, were two or three of the men-servants, their pale frightened faces looking ghastly in the light of the flaring candles.

“My dear boy!” he cried. “Thank God you are alive! We have been so frightened about you.”

I told him faintly that I had fallen in a swoon. I could not yet speak of what I had gone through, and, indeed, it now seemed like a hideous dream.

“Well, do you know,” he said, as he took my arm, and helped me up the stair, “we had such a scare upstairs! Just a few minutes after you had gone, when I was wondering whether you would find the right wine, smash came something right through the dining-room window, and over went the big candlestick, and we were in the dark. And when we got a light again, you never saw such a scared set as we were; but there was nothing to be seen. Did you have a visit, too?”

“Something did come down here,” I managed to articulate; “but don’t ask me about it—not to-night. I want to sleep first.”

“I think we all want that,” he said briefly, as we reached the lighted hall again; and I, for one, felt as if I had come up from the grave alive.

## CHAPTER VI.

I SLEPT late into the following morning, and should have slept later still had I not been aroused about ten o’clock by the butler, who held in his hand a yellow telegram envelope. As soon as I could shake off my drowsiness in part, I tore open the missive, and unfolding the paper, found to my surprise that it was from Macbane. He knew my address, indeed, from a letter that I had sent him; but knowing his ways, I never expected even a note from him, much less a telegram. When I read the message, my surprise was not diminished.

“If safe, and wishing to see me alive,” it ran, “come at once. If unable, forget me. Nearest station, Kilburgh.”

What could this mean? Could Macbane know anything of my mysterious danger of last night? and if so, was the doom that had missed me impending over him? Or was it merely that he

was ill and desponding, and thought himself dying? Turn and twist the message as I could, it puzzled me; but one thing was plain—Macbane was, or thought himself to be, in deadly need of me, his only friend, as far as I knew: and if I did not go, it was possible that he might lose the last chance of any friendly human care in his solitary life. I resolved at once, shaken and weary as I still felt, to start for Dullas Tower. I rose and dressed hurriedly, and snatched some breakfast alone—for my good old host was too much exhausted by the excitement of the last night to come down yet. While eating, I was studying a railway guide, and discovered that by driving to the nearest station at once, I could catch a train which would enable me by devious junction lines to make my way to Kilburgh (a little place in a wild part of a Lowland county) by the evening. While the horse was being put into the dog-cart, I scribbled a note to my host, explaining the reason for my speedy departure, and promising to return as soon as possible; and then I stepped into the cart and was driven off, arriving just in time to catch the train.

My journey was of the exasperatingly tedious character known to all who have ever tried to go any distance by means of cross-lines and local lines and junctions. Twice I got some food during my long intervals of waiting at stations; and all the time, whether travelling or resting, I was possessed with a haunting perplexity, a shadowy fear. Through my brain incessantly beat, keeping time to the pulsating roar of the wheels, a text, or something like one—I know not how or why it suggested itself—"One woe is past; behold another woe cometh." The mysterious peril of the last night seemed already to have happened years ago; the dim terror of the future would be ages in coming; and between them, and in the shadow of both, I was still going on and on, slowly but endlessly—a dream myself, and in a dream.

It was about eight in the evening, I think, when I reached Kilburgh station; but my watch had stopped, and I could not be sure. As I stepped out on the platform, I was conscious of an intense sultry heat in the dense night air, and a sudden little gust of wind smote on my cheek like a breath from a furnace. The train went on again, plunged with a doleful wailing shriek into a tunnel, and was lost to sight; and when its rumble died away, the utter stillness was strange after the noise and rattle in which I had passed the day. I cast a hasty glance round me, and could just make out the lights of a few houses in the valley below the station, and the dark outlines of hills around, some of

them serrated with black pines, and the sky dense with cloud, and with a denser mass of gloom labouring slowly up from the west. There was the weight of a coming storm in the air.

I asked the station-master where Dallas Tower was, and how I was to reach it.

"Dallas Tower?" he said meditatively; and then, with a sudden flash of comprehension—"Oh, it's the De'il's Tower ye'll be meaning, sir—Macbane's?"

I nodded acquiescence; this popular corruption of the name seemed ominous, but somehow natural.

"Then ye've a matter of ten miles to go," he said deliberately; "and gin I might offer an opeenion, ye'll do better to tak' Jimmy Brown's bit giggie. The man frae Macbane's tauld him to be ready the morn."

Guided by the cautious "opeenion" of the station-master, I found Brown's trap waiting outside the station. He was English, as I could tell by his accent; and this perhaps accounted for the slight tinge of contempt in the worthy official's reference to him and his vehicle. His horse, as far as I could tell by the station lamp, seemed a poor one; but it showed a remarkably vicious temper when I tried to get in—kicking and backing, and seeming possessed by an irrational desire to do me some bodily harm.

"Whoa, then, will ye, ye beast?" called Brown, as he caught hold of the rein and dexterously foiled the brute's instant attempt to bite him. "You're a harm to others and no good to your owner. You're just like Macbane's muckle cat, that killed two men, and the third was Macbane."

I had gained my place on the seat at last, but this remark nearly shook me off it again.

"What do you mean by that?" I almost screamed at the man. He turned a puzzled face up to mine, as he climbed into his place and took the reins.

"Oh, I don't know, sir," he answered, as we rattled off. "It's just a saying the folks have about here. It's some story about an old warlock Macbane that had the Tower long ago, I believe. Nothing to do with this one, sir—of course not. I got into the way of saying it from hearing it often, that's all."

I did not answer him, as we drove on between high banks of earth and rock, with now and then a tree nodding threateningly above us. I was faint and tired, and unable to think in a connected manner. The grim old proverb, like the Scriptural or quasi-Scriptural phrase, transformed itself into a dreary refrain, which rang in time to the beat of the horse-hoofs on the dry road: "*Killed two men, and the third was Macbane—killed two*"

*men*, and the *third* was *Macbane* "—it seemed a part of me, a pulse in my very brain, till it grew meaningless with incessant repetition.

We drove on westward, toiling up hills, rattling down them, always moving towards the storm, as the storm moved towards us. Now and then I heard the muttering of thunder—now and then a livid gleam of lightning glanced across the face of the cloud, or a moaning gust of hot wind swept up the dust, and fell silent again. I took little note of the scenery on either side; and indeed I could see but little of it in the darkness. The lightning, growing brighter and nearer, occasionally revealed some bare cliff-face, some solemn black row of pines, some thread or sheet of water—I hardly saw anything. It was all a part of my dream still, and it seemed natural to me when a black grove of tall trees, and in the midst a denser black mass, with one or two lights twinkling in it, rose up before us, and the driver told me this was the De'il's Tower.

As we came up to it, and I roused myself from my lethargy a little to observe my journey's end, I could see that part of the building seemed ruinous and broken down; the walls ended in a slope bristling with bushes. One grim-looking tower at the corner loomed high above us, apparently uninjured, and half-way up it shone a faint light.

I alighted, paid the driver, who seemed in a hurry to get away, rang, and when an old woman came to the door, asked if Macbane was at home. She said in reply that he was ill, and could see no one; but when I gave my name she conducted me through a long passage—part of it almost ruinous, part in better repair—to the foot of a winding stair. Here she told me to go up and knock at the first door I came to, and stood at the foot of the steps with her candle to light me up. When I reached the door—which was some way up—I could hear her hobble away, leaving me in darkness, only relieved by an occasional gleam of lightning through the narrow slits that let in light and air to the staircase. I knocked gently, and a voice said "Come in." I felt along the iron-studded door till I found and turned the handle of the latch. As I entered I saw Macbane sitting back in an old chair with a shaded lamp on the table beside him, and some books and papers in its circle of light. The room was small and circular, and was, as I conjectured, half-way up the tower that had given its name to the building. A window, made visible from time to time by the lightning, opened on the outer air; and I noticed with a sort of dull wonder that there seemed to be a set of strong bars defending it—perhaps a relic of old times when the room was a prison; I cannot tell.



My friend did not rise from his chair to greet me. He motioned languidly to a seat near him, and for some minutes I sat and looked at him, and he stared at the door. I noticed a new and alarming change in him, since I had seen him last. Then, his look had been almost malevolent, instinct with a positive hatred for men; now all passion, all life, good or bad, seemed extinct in him. He looked worn and wasted; but it was the settled stony hopelessness of his face that struck me most: and the pity that I had felt for him in his old days of poverty now revived tenfold.

After a long pause, only broken by the muffled growls of the nearer thunder, he spoke.

"I hardly thought you would come," he said; "but now you are here, you had better read this. There is not much time to explain"—and he pointed to a yellow and torn old manuscript lying on the table.

I was perplexed by this—for why should I have been sent for in hot haste to read an ancient document of this sort? But I did not inquire or object. It all seemed part of the inexplicable dream in which I was moving. I took up the roll and began to look into it.

It was crabbed and quaint in writing and style, and it would only be perplexing to give its antique phraseology and obsolete Scotch law-terms and phrases, even if I remembered them. But the substance of it was plain. It was a record of the trial and condemnation of Alexander Macbane of Dullas Tower for witchcraft, early in the seventeenth century. After many preliminaries, over which I passed hastily, the narrative came to the confession of the wizard. This was apparently volunteered, and not extorted by any torture; but such cases were by no means rare at that time, I think. The peculiarity of this confession was that it was clear, consistent, rational even (if so wild a tale could be called rational), and did not involve any one besides the wizard himself. Actual torture was applied, it would seem, to make Alexander Macbane implicate an old crone tried at the same time, but in vain. "The devil," he had said, "was no fool; he had better servants than these poor women." These particulars, petty though they may be, struck my attention at the time; and I have never been able to forget them since.

Briefly put, the gist of Alexander Macbane's confession was as follows. He admitted that he had, by certain magic processes which he refused to reveal (because their very simplicity might lead others to use them), secured the services of a strange familiar. This Thing owned him as master and did his bidding, though only in one way—it could slay, and nothing more. He had killed by

it two men, kinsmen of his, one his enemy and one his friend, who had in fact (a marginal note stated) died in a sudden and strange manner. But that which he had regarded as his servant (the confession went on to say) had become his master, and he a bondslave to its devilish power. It was jealous of all he did; it had cut off any beast for which he showed a fondness, and it had driven him to cast off all his friends, and to give up all friendly feeling for men. One man, whom he loved, he had bidden it slay, or else it would have slain himself. The Thing needed to have victims pointed out to it at certain intervals, or it turned on its master. Being asked how he knew the intentions of his familiar, the wizard answered that he could not tell how, but he divined its thoughts, even as, he felt sure, it read his. To the inquiry what form his demon assumed, he said that at first it was invisible to him as to others, but could be felt; and that gradually it took visible form as a beast black and catlike, with a great mouth.

The judges here asked the reason why Alexander Macbane had turned against his demon; the answer, given in quaint but still pathetic language, was that he had married a woman whom he loved, and had been happy with her for some months, and now he knew that he must choose between her and himself as a sacrifice to his familiar. In making his confession, he knew that he was devoting himself to death the same night; but he was resolved to do this. Better, he said, was it to die horribly thus, than to live alone with his sin and its punishment. "And so," the record concisely ended, "the said Alexander Macbane, being remanded to his prison, was there found dead the next day, with his throat rent through, and the bars of the window broken. Whereby it was thought that he had said the truth as to himself."

As I read the last words, I dropped the roll; for the lightning glared into my very face, and a moment after a ringing crash of thunder burst over the building as if sky and earth were coming together. Then the roar leaped and rolled through the clouds, and died muttering far away; and through the rush of rain and wind I heard Macbane's voice.

"You understand now," he said, with that dreadful hollow sameness in his tone; "I am glad any way that you will be left, and not I; I always liked you better than Standish. Perhaps it was a tiger after all that killed him, poor fellow. You are quite safe now; it is coming for me to-night. I thought it would have killed me last night, when I called it back——" a crash of thunder drowned his last words.

"Macbane!" I cried, finding my power of speech at last; "it shall not be! Whether it is real or a dream, I do not know; but you shall not die that way. I kept the Thing out; cannot you do it? Never give up hope. Cannot you save yourself?"

Macbane smiled hopelessly. "Listen," said he, and held up his hand; and in a pause of the rain I heard, low and distinct, a *scratching on the door*.

"Open it, Eliot," he said calmly. "It must come, and the sooner the better. Then go down and wait; for it will not be a pleasant thing to see."

I sprang to the door, but not to open it. With frenzied speed I locked and double-locked it, and drove the heavy bolts into their sockets. But no rush came against the door—no tearing or grinding of teeth. I could hear nothing—not even a breath; and the stillness was more terrifying than any sound.

"It is no use," said my friend; "you could keep yourself safe; you cannot save me. It will have help to-night."

A gust of wind swept round the tower as he spoke; and mingling in its wail I seemed to hear—or was it but my fancy?—the long deadly howl of the Thing that I felt was so near us. For a few moments there was silence. Then, with a crash, the lightning fell close to the tower, and a great pine, shattered by the stroke, rushed down right against the window, and its top crashed into the room, rending away the iron bars like rotten sticks. The wind of the fall extinguished the lamp; but in the darkness and the roar of thunder I could *feel* something pass by me with a mighty leap: and next moment a fainter flash showed me a picture which was but for an instant, but in that instant was branded in on my memory. Macbane stood upright with arms folded, gazing calmly forward and upward—and before him crouched, as if for a spring, a black mass with blood-red burning eyes—the same eyes that had glared on me the night before. So much I saw; then, suddenly, the world was one blinding flame, one rending crash around me, and I fell stunned and senseless.

When I lived again, the dawn's grey glimmer was dimly lighting the tower; and outside the blackened and shattered window a bird was singing. As I opened my eyes, my glance fell on something lying in the centre of the room; it was Macbane's body. I crawled to him and looked into the dead face. There was no wound or mark on him, and there even seemed a faint smile on his lips; and near his feet lay a little heap of grey ash.

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## What Men Live by.

FROM THE RUSSIAN OF COUNT TOLSTOI.

BY LADY LECHMERE.

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### CHAPTER I.

IN the small Russian village of Balachna lived Simon Strogonoff, a boot-maker by trade. His means were so small that with his wife and children he could not afford to do more than rent one room in the house of another peasant, from year's end to year's end; and he had a constant struggle to keep the wolf from his door, and it was only by the strictest economy that he succeeded.

Bread was dear and work was scarce. Whatever he earned he was obliged to spend on the barest necessities of life. Clothes, too, were so expensive, that the poor boot-maker and his wife had only one felt overcoat, which they shared between them; and even that was very old and full of holes. One autumn, after scraping and saving through the summer, he determined to go to the next village to buy some sheepskins, in order to make another overcoat, and thus enable his wife to attend mass in the winter, at the same time as himself. Counting his money he found that all he had got was three paper roubles (equal to about six shillings). He kept them locked up in his wife's trunk. In addition to this, five roubles were owing to him in the village, which with the three he already had would, he thought, enable him to carry out his plans. At last a favourable morning arrived, and putting on his wife's under-coat, which was padded, and the old felt overcoat on top of that, he bid adieu to his family, and set off to buy the skins.

As he went along he cut a stick from the hedgerow and began whistling, to make the way seem short, and knocking the stones hither and thither with his stick, was soon lost in thought.

"Yes," said he to himself, "I will collect the five roubles which are owed me, and add to them the three I now have, and I shall be able to get some splendid skins to make a capital overcoat.

Simon soon arrived at the village, and called at the house of one of his debtors, who, however, was not at home. His wife answered the door, expressed her regret that her husband should be absent, and quickly went on enquiring after Simon's wife and children, hoping his trade was good, and even went so far as to promise to

send her little boy round with the money during the week ; but she did not give him anything herself.

He went to another house, found his customer in, and politely asked if he would pay what he owed. The man, however, swore he had not the means to pay, and said that times were too bad. Simon always wanted his money before he had half done his job ; and not only that, the boots were not worn out yet. However, he paid twenty copecks for part of the bill (a small repairing job) ; and Simon was obliged to be content.

His other debtors one and all put him off, and he began to despair of ever getting the skins for his overcoat. "But," said he to himself, "I give my customers credit, surely the skinner will do the same for me ;" and he again began to think how nice his new overcoat would be. He went to the skinner's, and after some talk over the latest news and recent changes in the parish, told his errand, but said "that he could not pay just now, though he would do so as soon as he could collect his own debts." The skinner, however, said that "that was not his custom, and he could not part with his goods unless he were paid for them."

Poor Simon now saw that his case was hopeless ; he called at some other houses, but all he got was a pair of old boots to take home and mend.

"Poor Petrovna !" said he to himself ; "she was reckoning on the coat even more than I was." Petrovna was Simon's wife, and presently we shall hear more about her.

Turning towards home with a sad heart, Simon tried to make the best of things, left off thinking about the coat he could not get, when suddenly a public-house caught his eye. "Ah !" said he, starting, "I think a drop of spirits will do me good. I can't get much of anything with twenty copecks ; so I may just as well spend them on a drink as food—besides, I am quite thirsty and cold." He entered the house, and soon turned his money into drink.

"Ah ! that was good," said he, leaving the door and sallying out into the street. "Why, it was quite cold in the morning ; I declare it's warm now."

He dawdled homewards with his repairing job under one arm, swinging his stick about with his other hand, muttering, stuttering, and slipping, quite overcome by the spirits he had taken.

"Yes, it's quite warm," he went on again—"don't believe I shall want an overcoat all the winter ; I've got some good blood in my veins, I have ; but what will my wife say when I come home without the skins—that's more than I can tell. She's a rum 'un, she is, too ; but she ain't a bad sort, after all. I work for



her, slave for her, and keep her going ; but she does just what she likes with me. Ah, well ! it's my fault for getting married.

"I suppose I never get a job worth more than twenty copecks, and what can I do with that ?—a little drink now and then don't hurt a feller. I have need, and others have luxury. Hang it all, I'll have a go for once in a way. Others have land, castle, and everything good ; but when once you've seen me, you've seen all my property too. Others have wealth and fine houses, I have to live in lodgings, for which they charge me three roubles a week, and I go where I may. Times are bad indeed."

So speaking, he came up to a chapel in a turn of the road ; and looking in front of him, saw something white. It was getting dark, and Simon felt a bit frightened. Straining his eyes, he tried to distinguish what it was. "A stone," said he—"No, it cannot be ; there is not one near the place. A cow ?—No, it's too small for that. The head looks like a man's, but everything else about it is white. Besides, a man could not be out here naked on a cold night like this." He got nearer, when to his intense surprise he discovered that it was a man. Simon wondered how he got there ; whether he were alive or dead ; and what on earth he could be doing—leaning naked and motionless against the side of an empty chapel, above all places. "I suppose he must have been robbed," said Simon to himself, scarcely daring to let his heart beat for fright—"robbed by some scoundrels, and then left here to freeze. If I go too near I may get implicated in the crime ; and I don't like getting mixed up in a job like this." Simon walked past the chapel, but could not help looking round ; and doing so, he just happened to see the man make a slight movement. This arrested him, and he began to think whether he was doing right in leaving the man. His conscience kept on reproving him. His better nature said "Go and help him ;" but the Evil One reasoned with him, and tried to dissuade him, saying, "If you go, he may jump up at you and throttle you ; most likely he is an impostor, and is there for no good purpose." However, Simon could not leave the man ; and poor as he was, and with so little of this world's store that he could call his own, he determined to see if he could not help him.

## CHAPTER II.

SIMON retraced his steps, and went up to the white object : he saw a young man, in the prime of life, naked and freezing, but with no signs of violence on him ; leaning up against the chapel and peering with a wistful look at him.

Simon came quite close all at once, and the man started, turned his head and looked at Simon with a face that spoke volumes, without uttering a sound. From that moment Simon's heart went out to the stranger, and all at once his prejudices and fears vanished. The stranger's look acted like magic, and in less time than it takes to write, off came Simon's coat, and he was almost pulling the lifeless man into it. He made him put on the boots he had under his arm, and was almost giving him his hat when he remembered his baldness, and moreover noticed that the stranger had a splendid head of curly hair. Simon noticed that his skin was soft and fair, and his limbs were not hardened by work; and his face had a humble, and at the same time a refined, look. There was something fascinating about the mysterious man.

"Now, Brother," said Simon, "get up, stretch yourself, and make yourself warm; it will all come right soon (thinking the man had been robbed and ill-treated). Can you walk?"

The man stood up and looked at Simon, but did not utter a word.

"Why don't you speak out, man?" said Simon. "We can't pass the winter here. We must get under some roof. There you are—take my stick and lean on it. Come on, and let's be off."

The man moved, commenced walking, and to Simon's surprise kept pace with him.

Simon was now burning with curiosity to know all about the stranger, and so he began: "Do you belong here?"

"*I am not of this place,*" said the other softly, and with a tinge of sadness.

"However did you get to the chapel?"

"I cannot say."

"Some rascals must have robbed you?"

"No one has touched me. God has punished me."

"Oh! of course God," said Simon; "but we must get on. Where do you want to go to?"

"All places are alike to me."

Simon was astonished, and said to himself: "He's not like an impostor, and his speech is soft, but he will not say anything about himself;" and he wondered what could have happened.

"My house is not much of a place," said he to the other again; "but if you like to come with me, you are welcome."

By this time they had got close to Balachna, and the cold weather, combined with Simon's misgivings as to the reception his wife would give the man he was bringing, altogether took away the exhilarating effect of the spirits he had drunk, and he began to feel quite cold.

"Whatever will Petrovna say! I went for a coat, and I've

come back without it ; and besides that, brought another mouth to fill, she will say. It's just like me. Ah, well ! ”

He glanced at the stranger, and remembering how he looked when his half-frozen form was leaning against the chapel, his spirits revived, and the thought that he had done some one else good consoled him.

### CHAPTER III.

Now let us leave Simon and his friend for a time, and take a peep into the cottage where his wife Petrovna was waiting for her husband's return. She had done everything about the house early—got in the wood for the morrow morning's fire, put the children to bed, and was beginning to expect Simon with the skins.

“ What can have kept him so long ? ” she murmured. “ I hope he has not got cheated ; he is rather a fool at marketing. But there, I can't do everything ; he must do something more than patch boots all his life.”

And so she left off thinking about Simon, and turned her attention to her cupboard. It was nearly bare. She thought of Simon coming in hungry, and wondered what she should give him to eat ; but as he had been so long gone, she thought he would surely have got something to eat in the village ; and, consoling herself with this thought, she took up an old garment that needed a patch, and set to work upon it.

She had scarcely begun before she heard a noise on the stone outside the door, and some one entered the house. Petrovna stuck her needle into her work, and went to see who it was. It did not seem quite like Simon's tread, and to her utter astonishment she spied two men in the passage. One certainly was Simon, but he had no coat on. The other was a perfect stranger. Petrovna was quite bewildered, and she immediately smelt the spirits, and her head dropped. “ Ah ! ” she sobbed, “ he has been drinking, after all ; and instead of bringing a coat, has lost one, and brought home one of his drunken companions with him.”

Her mortification was intense, and without speaking a word she shewed them into the room. When they were inside she saw that the stranger had on their long overcoat, and it seemed the only garment that covered him, except an old pair of boots on his feet. His hat was also gone. “ He has lost that in some drunken fray, I suppose,” said she to herself ; “ but he does not look like a rascal at all.”

The stranger remained perfectly still and quiet, and hung his head down, giving Petrovna the impression that after all he must have been doing something bad.

"Well, Petrovna," said Simon, sitting down, "get us something for supper."

Petrovna muttered something, but did not stir an inch. She first looked at him, and then at the stranger, and shook her head.

Simon saw his wife was angry, but, saying nothing, took the stranger by the hand and sat him down at the table. "Now, Petrovna," said he, cheerfully, "give us something to eat; we're hungry."

"Something to eat?" said she, sulkily. "It's all very well to ask for something; but why did you not get some lunch in the village? I see what you have been doing. You went away from here to get a coat, but have come back with less than nothing; and besides that, brought another mouth to feed. Anyhow, I have got nothing for you drunkards."

"Be quiet, Petrovna! What's the use of all that noise about nothing? You had better ask who the stranger is."

"Tell me where you spent the money," said she, interrupting him passionately.

Simon put his hand in his pocket, pulled out three roubles, and threw them on the table. "There they are."

This made Petrovna more angry, and she did not fail to show it. She was disappointed at having deceived herself, and snatching up the paper angrily, said, "I have no supper to feed drunken and naked men with."

"Petrovna, do keep your tongue quiet and listen to reason."

"What reason shall I get from a drunkard?"

"Men who drink  
Never think"

said she, and went on: "I never wanted to marry you; it was all because of mother. You spent all I ever had, on drink. Here you go to buy sheepskins, and get drunk instead."

Simon was anxious to explain to his wife that he had only spent twenty-five copecks (sixpence), where he found the man, and all that happened; but Petrovna would not let him. She pulled her husband by the sleeve, called him bad names and cried, almost tore off the coat he had on, and moved towards the door and declared she would leave the place.

#### CHAPTER IV.

THE wintry night, however, somewhat cooled her heated temper, and she stood near the door of the room. "If he was a good man," she said, pointing to the stranger, "he would not be in that state. Look, he has not got anything on, except a pair of boots and a coat."

"Well," said Simon, "do let me explain. I was going past the chapel, and there he was against the wall, freezing. God sent me there, or he would have been quite dead. How could I leave him to die? It would have been a sin. I took him up, and put my coat and boots on him."

Petrovna wanted to say something bad, but stopped herself, and looked at the stranger, who was sitting motionless with his hands upon his knees, his head drooping on his chest, and his eyes closed. She did not say a word.

"Petrovna, is not there a God, who will judge us some day?" said Simon.

When Petrovna heard these words she looked at the stranger, and the sight of him melted her heart. She came back from the door, and went to the fireplace to get some supper. The stranger looked up and smiled. Petrovna's whole manner was changed, and she soon had a nice little dish ready for them.

"Well, now, begin and eat," said she, when she had done; and they set to work.

"Help yourself," said Simon to the stranger, and he handed him a dish of broth. "You will find this good after the cold night."

Petrovna sat down at the corner of the table and kept her eyes on the stranger, and looking at him harder and harder, she began quite to take to him; and not only that, but also to love him. The stranger lifted his eyes, looked at Petrovna, and smiled.

They finished their meal, and Petrovna tidied the place after them, and commenced to speak to the stranger.

"Where do you come from?"

"I am a stranger," he answered.

"But how did you manage to get on the road?"

"I cannot tell."

"Who robbed you?"

"God punished me."

"So you were lying there quite naked?"

"Yes, I was. Simon saw me, pitied me, took off his coat, put it on me, and told me to follow him. Here I am. You have taken me in, and nourished me. The Lord will save you."

Petrovna seemed satisfied and anxious at the same time. However, she ferreted out some sort of clothes for him, and told him he might have them to wear; and, showing him where to sleep, bade him good-night.



## CHAPTER V.

IN the morning Simon and Petrovna had a discussion as to what was the best to be done with the stranger. They were both humane people, and had been brought up to fear God; and though perhaps they were sometimes not so attentive to their church duties as they ought to be, yet they had good hearts, and could not bear the idea of turning the poor stranger out on the streets, although it was as much as they could do to keep body and soul together sometimes; and not only had they themselves to consider, but their children. However, they decided that they would teach him their trade and let him live with them. "Perhaps God will take care of us," said Petrovna, "if we take care of this poor stranger."

For breakfast Petrovna had not a crumb, so she went to a neighbour's to borrow some bread; her husband and the stranger had eaten all she had the previous night.

Simon now turned to the stranger, who was sitting on the bench by the stove with his eyes turned upwards, and his face seemed much brighter than yesterday. "Well," said Simon, "the stomach wants food, and the body clothes. Times are bad, and you must earn your living. Can you work? Do you know any trade?"

"No, I don't really," replied the stranger, a little sadly. Simon was astonished, as all the poorer children in Russia are taught some trade; but he said cheerfully:

"Oh! if you have got the pluck, you can learn anything."

"I am quite willing."

"But you have not told me your name yet," said Simon. "What is it?"

"My name is Michael."

"Well, Michael, if you don't care to say much about yourself, that's your own business; but you must work, and if you do what I tell you, I will look after you."

"May the Lord bless you! I will learn anything you will show me."

By this time Petrovna had got breakfast ready, and they sat down to a very plain meal. The stranger somehow did not seem quite at ease, but Simon said nothing. He kept on wondering in his mind as to what the history of the man could be. After the meal he took him into his shop, and Michael's lesson commenced. Simon took some cobbler's thread, put it on his fingers, and began waxing it with cobbler's wax. "There you are," said he—"it is not hard."

Michael looked, took the thread, and quickly learned that part of the business. In fact, whatever Simon showed him he seemed at once to fall into, and it was not many days before he had mastered every branch of the trade; and one would have thought he had been brought up a boot-maker all his life, so quickly did he get on.

Simon was delighted with his new hand, and gave him most of the work to do; but try all he could, he did not succeed in gaining any information about Michael's past history. Michael was most persevering. He stuck to his work, and stitched and hammered all day long, and Simon noticed that whenever his eyes happened to be off his work they were turned upwards. He never went out except to chapel; never said too much; never played the fool, and did not even laugh. Simon had only seen him smile even once, on that first night, when Petrovna gave him his supper.

#### CHAPTER VI.

DAY after day passed by, and week after week, until at last Michael had lived a whole year under Simon's roof.

Simon's business had prospered wonderfully, and his work had got the reputation of being the best in all the country round.

This was all through Michael: he had a wonderful knack of making good boots, and Simon's shop was patronized by all the gentry in the neighbourhood; and so well did he get on that he had a whole house to himself instead of lodgings, as was the case when Michael came.

One day Simon and Michael were at their work, when suddenly they heard a sledge draw up to the door. Simon jumped off his seat, looked out of the window, and saw a footman get off the box and open the door of the sledge. A nicely-dressed gentleman got out, walked towards the porch, and entered the shop with an air as if all he saw belonged to him, nearly bumping his head against the ceiling as he came in. Simon got up and bowed. He had never before seen such a grand-looking gentleman in his shop as this one.

The gentleman stretched himself, looked round, took off his coat, and sat down.

"Well, boot-maker?"

"Yes, your honour," said Simon.

"Bring in the leather, Thomas," shouted the gentleman to the footman; and in came Thomas with a big pile under his arm.

I may as well tell you here that in Russia the gentlemen find their own leather, and the boot-maker makes it up into boots, as

they may order. "Well, boot-maker," said the gentleman, turning to Simon again, "do you see that leather?"

"Yes, sir," said Simon, very respectfully.

"Do you know what sort it is?"

"It is very good," said Simon timidly, after a short pause.

"Of course it is good," said the gentleman. "Why, you idiot, I don't believe you ever saw good leather before. Now can you make me boots that will fit?"

"Indeed we can fit any one here, sir."

"Well, if you will measure me, you can make the boots for me, but mind, they must fit; they must look nice; and mark this, they must not wear out for a whole year. If they do, I'll make you sorry for it."

Simon was terrified, and turned to Michael. "Shall I take the job?" he whispered.

Michael nodded his head.

Very carefully Simon set to work to measure, when suddenly the gentleman said "Who is that?" pointing to Michael.

"That is my assistant," said Simon—"the one who will make the boots."

"Well, mind you make them to last for a year."

Simon looked at Michael, who was quite motionless, and who did not even look at the gentleman, but with his face turned upwards *smiled*.

The measuring was soon over, and Simon's new customer got up to go; but before leaving he said, "Now mind, you must have them ready by this day week."

"Certainly, sir," said Simon, bowing; and the gentleman bounded out of the shop.

Simon and Michael looked at one another, and Petrovna, who had been listening behind the door to what had been going on, put her head inside and said, "Well, I never saw such a man in all my days."

## CHAPTER VII.

"WELL," said Simon, "we have taken the work; I hope we sha'n't make a mess of it. The stuff is good, and the pay is good, but the gentleman is evidently a tough customer. Set to work, Michael; your hand is better than mine at a fine job like this. I will make the trees."

Without saying a word, Michael took the leather, put it on the table before him, folded it, took a knife, and began cutting.

Petrovna came out of her room at this moment, and stood close to Michael to see how he would take such an important order in

hand. "What is he doing?" thought she to herself—"he is surely making a mistake;" for she understood a little of the way they cut leather for boots.

She watched Michael intently, and wanted to speak, but thought "Well, he knows how to make boots by this time. I had better not interfere, though he certainly is cutting that leather funnily."

Michael finished the cutting, took the thread, and commenced to sew; not with a double thread, however, as they do for boots, but with a single one, as they do when making slippers.

Simon now came and had a look at Michael, and seeing he was making slippers, exclaimed, "What are you doing, Michael? You have worked very well all the time you have been with us, and never made a single mistake; but whatever are you up to now? The gentleman ordered *boots*, and you are making him slippers without any soles, and have spoilt the leather. What shall I do now; I can't match that leather anywhere? What *have* you done?"

Just at this moment they heard a knock at the door, and in came the footman belonging to the gentleman who had ordered the boots.

"I have come," said he suddenly, "to say that My Lady sent me about the boots. They are not wanted."

"What do you mean?" said Simon.

"My master is dead: he died on the way home. When we got to the house I opened the carriage door, and there he was leaning back in his seat quite stiff and dead. My Lady sent me to tell you that the boots are not wanted; but please make burying slippers with the leather at once, and I will wait for them and take them back with me."

Michael took the pieces of leather that were not used, and with them put the slippers, wrapped them up, and handed them to the footman.

"Thank you; good-bye," said the latter, and went off again.

The slippers they put on dead people's feet in Russia to bury them in have no soles to them, and so are quickly made; and consequently you need not be surprised at Michael having them ready so soon.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Time passed on, and Michael had now been six years under Simon's roof. He was always the same: he never went anywhere, never said too much, worked with a will, and all the time only smiled twice—once when Petrovna gave him his first supper,

and the second time when the gentleman ordered the boots which were to last him a whole year.

Simon's delight in his *protégé* was unbounded. He soon left off asking him who he was, whence he came, and all that kind of thing; but one thing troubled him, he thought Michael would go.

One day they were sitting together, and things were going on in their accustomed easy, comfortable manner, Simon stitching, Michael making a sole, Petrovna cooking, and the children playing, when one of the latter called out "Oh, Uncle Michael!"—for thus had they learned to address him—"look who is coming to us, a lady with two little children; and one of them is lame."

The boy had hardly done speaking before Michael stopped his work, got up, and peered out of the window into the street.

Simon was astonished. Michael had never looked out of the window before, and now he was intensely interested at what was going on outside.

Simon now got up and looked out himself, and saw a well-dressed lady leading two little girls by the hand, approaching the shop.

The little girls were very much alike, but one had a crooked ancle and was lame.

The lady came up to the door of the shop, opened it, let the little girls in, and followed them herself.

"Good day, Madam," said Simon, with a bow. "What can I do for you?"

"Well," said she, sitting down, "I want you to make some boots for my two little girls."

"Certainly," said Simon; and after a little talk the measures were taken, the price arranged, when, looking towards Michael, he said, "Michael is my man, he makes splendid boots, and I am sure his work will give you satisfaction."

Michael had stopped his work entirely, and to Simon's amazement was staring hard at the little girls. They were nice-looking, well-dressed, and had a good colour in their cheeks, but still Simon was astonished. However, he turned to the lady again, and in a kind tone asked how the poor little girl got lame. "Was she born so?" said he.

"Nearly," said the lady, "but not quite. When but a few days old her mother laid on her in bed, and it was done then."

"Are you not her mother, then?" asked Petrovna on hearing this.

"No," answered the lady, "I am no relation to them whatever; but I adopted them."

"They are not your children, and yet you take such an interest in them?"



"Of course I do; I am their foster-mother. I once had a child of my own, but God took it; and so I adopted these because their mother died and they were left friendless."

#### CHAPTER IX.

THE lady then began relating the history of the little girls:—

"Six years ago," said she, "their father and mother died both in the same week, and these were left orphans only three days old. At that time I was a peasant woman. The father of these was working in a wood, and a tree fell across him and killed him. They had not time to bring him home before he had given up his soul to God, and the mother gave birth to these two in the same week. She had no mother to be a grand-parent to them, and no daughter to be a sister; in fact not a single relative. When she gave them birth she was completely alone in the world. I thought I had better go and see her. I called, and on gaining an entrance to the house found her dead in bed, lying on one of the little girls, who, as you see, is lame in consequence.

"The neighbours clubbed together and buried her decently; but what was to be done with the two babes? I had a child myself then whom I was feeding, he was only eight weeks old; and I agreed to take these until some one should take pity on them. It was a hard struggle to feed three children, for I was poor, but I was young and hopeful.

"My husband's business prospered, and we now live at the mill over yonder; and I do not know what I should do without these children, the world would seem empty, I love them so much."

Telling the story of the children affected the lady considerably, so much so that her tears flowed fast, and she was quite overcome by her feelings. "The proverb is true," said she again, "that children can live without father or mother, but not without God."

Simon and Petrovna had listened to the story with such interest that they forgot everything else at the moment, and on looking round again they saw a bright light illuminating that part of the room where Michael sat. All looked at him, and they saw that his hands had fallen on his knees, and he was looking up smiling.

#### CHAPTER X.

THE lady and the two children went out after ordering their boots and giving particulars about the bad foot. Michael got up off his seat, put down his work, took off his apron, and bowed low to both his hosts. "Forgive me," said he, "God has forgiven me."

Simon perceived a strong light round Michael, and, not knowing quite what it meant, got up, and bowed very low. "I see, Michael," said he, "that you are not a common man. I see that you cannot stay here with us any longer, and I will not ask you to; only tell me why, when I brought you to my house, you were so dull, and, when Petrovna brought you some supper, smiled and were merry? Why did you smile when the gentleman was ordering his boots? And why did you smile when the lady brought the children? Tell me, Michael?"

"The load goes from me now, because I have been punished by God, and am forgiven. I smiled three times because I had three things to learn, and I have got to know them. One thing I got to know when your wife took pity on me, and I smiled the first time. The next thing I got to know when the rich man was ordering his boots, and then for the second time I smiled; and for the third time I smiled when I saw the little girls, and got to know the third thing."

"Tell me, Michael," said Simon, "why did God punish you? And what were the things He wanted you to learn?"

Michael answered:

"God punished me because I did not obey Him. I was an angel in heaven and disobeyed God. He sent me to the earth to take the soul of a woman. I flew down and found the woman lying in bed ill, having given birth to two little girls—twins. The woman saw me come, and knew that God had sent me, and began crying. 'Angel of God,' said she, 'my husband has just been killed by a falling tree. I have no sisters, no friends, no relatives, no one to leave these infants. Oh, don't take me, please; let me set my children on their feet first; they cannot get on without a father or mother.' I heeded what the poor mother said, and left her to take care of her children, and flew up again to the Lord in heaven. I came to him and said, 'I could not take the soul of that poor mother; her husband had just been killed by a tree falling on him, and the mother said to me "Do let me set these children on their feet, they cannot live friendless." I did not take the soul of the woman. Then the Lord said to me: 'Go, take the soul of that mother, and you shall learn three things; you shall learn what is in man, what is not given to man, and by what men live. When you learn these three things come back to heaven.' I came back to the earth and took the mother's soul. The children fell from their mother's breast, and the mother turned in her bed dead, and crushed one of the children's legs. I flew with her soul to God, and was then sent down again to earth as a man."

## CHAPTER XI.

SIMON and Petrovna now understood whom they had clothed, whom they had fed, and who had lived with them. They wept for fear and joy, and Michael continued:

“I was in the field alone and naked. I did not know before then what man’s wants were; I had never felt hunger, and I did not know what cold was, but then I understood all. I became a man. I was hungry and frozen, and did not know what to do. I saw in the field a chapel built for God. I approached God’s house, and wanted to take shelter in it, but it was locked and I could not get in. I got on the most sheltered side of the building and tried to avoid the wind. The evening came on and I was hungry, half dead, and frozen, when suddenly I heard some one coming. It was a man passing; he was carrying some boots, and talking to himself as he walked. It was the first face I had seen since I became a man. I was frightened, and I turned away from it. I heard the man talking how he would clothe himself, and how he would feed his wife and children, and I thought to myself, ‘Here I am, dying of cold and hunger, and there goes a man wondering how he can keep his wife and family. Ah, I am afraid he can’t help me.’ The man saw me and frowned, and looking troubled passed away. I fell into despair, but all at once I heard him returning. In his face before was death, now he was an angel of life. He came to me, addressed me, and took me to his home; I came to his house, and his wife met us. She looked even worse than he had done. The foul spirit seemed to come out of her mouth, and I hardly dared to breathe. She wanted to send me out into the cold, but I knew she would die if she did so. All at once her husband reminded her of God, and the woman changed directly. She gave us some supper. She looked at me, and I at her, and now there was no more death in her face. She was life, and I saw the image of God in her; and I remembered the first word of God, ‘You will find out what is in man.’ I found out there was love in man, and rejoiced that God had begun already to show me what I was to learn, and I smiled for the first time.

“I had not, however, learned all my lesson yet. I did not understand what was not given to man, or by what men live. I lived with you, and soon the rich gentleman came and ordered his boots. ‘They must be so good,’ said he, ‘as not to wear out for a year.’ I looked behind him and saw my companion the death angel. No one else could see him. But I knew full well that the sun would not set before the rich man’s soul had been taken from him; and I thought to myself, ‘That man is storing up goods for a

year, but does not know that he won't live another night: 'and I remembered the second word of God—'That which is not given to man.' What was in man I knew already, and now I learned what was not given to man—to be anxious for to-morrow. Yes, to-morrow is not given to man. Then I smiled the second time.

"I could not fully understand, however, yet—I did not know what men lived by. I lived on and waited for God to show me the third thing, and in the sixth year came the lady with the twins and I recognized the little girls, and understood then what had been the means of their existence. I did not wonder then why the mother asked me for life. I saw the stranger who had taken the little girls, heard how her husband had prospered, and saw in her also the image of God. I remembered His third word. I smiled the third time, for I knew He had forgiven me."

## CHAPTER XII.

THE angel's body was in a moment clad in such bright garments that Simon and Petrovna could not look at him. He spoke louder, and the voice seemed to come, not from him, but from heaven.

"I understand now that man does not live by thinking of himself, but by loving others. What was not needed for the life of her children was not given to the woman. It was not given to the rich man to know what he would want on the morrow, and not a soul knew that he would not want boots, but slippers for his burial instead. I was granted life when I was a man not because I thought of myself, but because there was love in the passer-by and his wife, and they pitied me. The orphans were granted life, not because they thought of themselves, but to cheer the heart of the loving woman who brought them up; and the one thing that keeps men alive is, not each thinking of himself, but the love of all for one another. I have now found out the great reason of life. Life is given to men that they may love one another, and he that is in love is in God, and God is in him, for 'God is love.'"

Then the roof seemed to open, and the angel went up again to God, and you can well understand Simon's joy at having entertained an angel unawares.

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## The Unbidden Guest.

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“Listen—I killed a fly this morning! It buzzed, and I wouldn’t have it. So it died—pop! So shall she!”—*Ruddygore, Act I.*

HARK! how the wind roars among the trees! In great bursts and starts it comes, making loose shutters bang and creak; driving the hail and dead leaves clattering against the window-panes; whistling through chinks and crannies; now pausing for a few moments, then raging again with redoubled fury like some evil spirit angry alike with mankind and inanimate nature. If such an evil spirit it were, it would be still more angry to know that its impotent blustering and bullying did but lend an additional charm and comfort to the family circle drawn closely round the blazing fire. It would be mad with the sense of its foiled rage, could it realise that the laughter was brighter, the jokes more quickly flowing and even the plum-pudding and punch more delicious than usual on account of the contrast between the well-lit comfortable room and the horrid night without. For it is winter time, and these bright spots inside four stout walls draw men’s hearts closer together and give them a sense of friendship and hospitality which somehow or other seems to fade and wane a little when the sun is shining in summer skies, and birds are singing in the wood. Howl on then, you spiteful North wind—howl on, for you do but fan the flame of brotherly love, and strike chords in the human heart which a less rude hand would not cause to vibrate. Truly it is an awful night! One would not, as the saying is, turn a dog out in such weather. What living creature indeed would a man who had anything worthy to be called a heart beating within him, refuse to entertain at such a time? Ah! you smile with a sense of your unbounded hospitality as you sit by your fire watching the glow flitting across the faces of your children around you, but if you were asked here and now to practise your newly-born doctrine of hospitality, would you do so, or would the feeling die suddenly away from your breast like that lull of the storm just now? Do you know that in this very room of yours there is an unbidden guest watching your every movement, smelling the savoury odours that rise from your table, scenting afar off the steam of the punch-bowl, longing to share your feast with you, and waiting anxiously to be asked? Will you



not put a place for him on your hearth? Will you not give him a stool or chair at your board? Will you allow another living thing to die at this season of the year from cold and starvation in sight of your food, and in the light, though hardly in the warmth of your blazing logs? You look round: you see no claimant of your hospitality, you say. No more did Scrooge till Spirits from another world forced him to do so. No ungenerous or miserly man ever does see these claimants till some accident—it may be this very storm to which we are listening—brings him to his better self and opens his purblind eyes. Look round once again, and this time more carefully. Unless you are determined not to see, you will discover up in the far corner of the ceiling, a benumbed, hungry, thirsty, trembling old fly! For the last hour he has been casting a thousand mute and yearning glances towards you, and you have not responded. Now that he has at last caught your eye, he trembles still more than before. Half afraid that you will send for the housemaid with the long broom, his fright increases—he totters—his feet give way—he falls with a faint buzz heavily to the floor. Stunned by the blow and conflicting emotions of hope and fear, he lies motionless and silent on his back, with his legs folded over his meagre breast. But he is not dead—far from it. He has merely had one of his epileptic attacks. Every night since winter began, has this poor old creature fallen the whole height of your room from ceiling to carpet as soon as ever the fire went out. Every night he has felt the gradual chill creeping over his body, until he slowly awoke from dreams of summer skies to wait for the inevitable catastrophe in store for him. At last it comes, and paralyzed with cold, he drops to the ground. With each recurring day he gathers himself together, and, with what strength remains to him after his broken rest, contrives to warm his shuddering limbs at the newly-lit fire and then, after infinite toil, and very, very slowly, does he mount the perpendicular height just in time to escape the awful brooms and dusters which seem to leave no corner of the room unexplored. Does he stir no spark of pity or compassion in your heart as he lies there before you in his old age, hungry, shivering, and defenceless? Would it be so very great an act of self-denial to satisfy his appetite for this once and to say to him, as did that good man, William Oldys:—

“Busy, curious, thirsty fly,  
Drink with me and drink as I?”

See how he brushes away with his fore-leg the thousand tiny tears of joy which come welling forth from as many eyes, while you tenderly take him up and place him by the hearth! The warmth

and the punch bring back the old fire of youth into his poor aged limbs. He begins to grow merry : he spreads his wings, flies at the lamp and buzzes a song of gratitude. This buzzing will now continue for several hours. Are you sorry that you have instilled new life into an expiring fellow-creature ? Are you sorry that you have postponed death for one who is almost certainly fated to succumb to age and cold and the bitter East winds, before the present month is out ? Even now he is gratefully buzzing his thanks into your ears, long after you have composed yourself to go to sleep. The family party has broken up hours ago ; the supper has been cleared away ; there is nothing left now in the punch-bowl ; yet that old fly, who a few hours since could scarcely crawl, is flitting to and fro all over your bedroom, buzzing in your ear, bouncing into your eye, settling on your nose, and showing by a thousand signs how he appreciates your acts of hospitality and kindness. That was one o'clock that struck, and still the fly is buzzing about just as if it were the middle of a summer's day. The generous spirit he has imbibed has excited him. He cannot sleep—nor indeed can you. Gradually the flickering blaze from the fire dies away, only lighting up the room now and again with a fitful glare, making the subsequent gloom seem more dark by comparison. You turn on your right side and on your left ; you lie face downwards and face upwards ; you count imaginary sheep jumping over stiles ; you repeat as much of the multiplication table as you can remember—but in vain. The fly is as merry and grateful as ever. The clock strikes two. The fire seems now to have gone out and the cinders make a mysterious crackling sound, as though somebody were breaking biscuits in the fender. But your little insect friend is making a regular Walpurgis night of it. By the loudness of his buzzing you feel that he is near you ; then it dies away, and you know he has settled on your dressing-table. You begin to wonder how he managed to follow you from the dining-room here. Angry and uncharitable feelings arise within your breast. The hospitable host is fast developing into the cold-blooded Scrooge.

But what is this figure moving in the darkness ? A man rises from his bed—lights a candle—mutters strange and dreadful monosyllables—seizes a lawn-tennis racket firmly in his right hand—gives a sudden bang, and stretches a poor insect lifeless on the floor ! There is a faint buzz and a wriggle, and then all is over. The figure returns to the bed, blows out the candle, and in two minutes nothing is to be heard but loud and regular snoring. But still he is not alone ! Two forms seem to float into the room and converse together in strange unearthly tones, heard by the sleeper in his troubled dreams only too distinctly, and causing him to start and toss upon

his bed like a fevered man. One of these ghostly visitors has an almost god-like appearance; the other, all the characteristics of a devil. "The East and the West are met," says the first, "on a common errand. The laws of hospitality have been outraged: I shall not spare the culprit." "And when a subject of mine has been slaughtered," answers the other, "I am accustomed to avenge the murder with something worse than death." "Since that is so, let your punishment suffice for both of us." "Well said, Jupiter Hospitalis! This very night will I carry him away." "To-morrow then, I shall be able to reply, 'Well done, Beelzebub, God of Flies.'"

The sun rises, the cocks are crowing, the bedroom door is opened, but the bed is empty!

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## Dr. Gabriel's Experiment.

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DR. GABRIEL'S experiment with its extraordinary result has been thoroughly sifted by many learned and scientific societies. Indeed I believe the whole scientific world has at last been forced to accept if not to understand the facts in connection with it. It is not so, however, with the outside world—the lay public; exaggerated accounts have found their way into the daily papers; rapacious contributors to weekly light literature have eagerly seized upon the weird truth to build upon it a tower of sensational fiction; writers of leading articles totally ignorant of the true story have gone so far as to accuse those directly concerned of wilful fraud.

To those who have known Dr. Gabriel, and have enjoyed his friendship; to those who have been his fellow-workers in science and have learned to appreciate his genius; these misunderstandings, these ridiculous exaggerations are especially painful. It is, then, under such circumstances that I have been requested to write clearly, and as far as possible without the use of scientific terms, all that is known of this remarkable experiment.

Dr. Gabriel has been well known in medical circles as the rising oculist of St. Joseph's Hospital. His indefatigable efforts have largely added to the literature of his special subject. His investigations and experiments in optics and the surgery of the eye have placed him in the front rank of his profession, and have secured for him a lasting reputation.

Our acquaintance, I regret to say, was not extensive; occasionally we have met at the house of his colleague Dr. Benson, sometimes in the hunting field and rarely in society.

There is no necessity to describe his personal appearance, suffice it to say that it needed but a glance to assure one that he was a man of keen intellect and a gentleman. His manner, always courteous, was somewhat too reserved to please most people, although amongst his intimate friends this reserve was found to cover a mine of humour and good nature.

From Dr. Benson I have learned much concerning the oculist's private life, his work at the hospital, his inventions and experiments, and the esteem in which he was held by his colleagues.

A little more than a year ago, Dr. Gabriel married the beautiful

daughter of a celebrated artist, a girl who, without being in the least degree a blue-stocking, had received a far higher education than most English women. She interested herself greatly in her husband's studies and by her artistic abilities was enabled to be of considerable service to him in preparing drawings to illustrate his great work on the 'Eye.' Much of her time was spent in such useful labour.

No wonder then these two were more united than the majority of married people.

Although Mrs. Gabriel's beauty was of such an high order as to have made it an easy matter for her to reign as a leading star in society, society's prizes had no temptation for her. Entirely devoted to her husband and his work, her happiness was perfect. Truly Dr. Gabriel was a fortunate man to have won such a companion in toil and recreation! But their happiness was short lived. They had been married but one year—one year of unbroken gladness—when, the summer session having passed, Dr. Gabriel put science and practice entirely away, and prepared to spend his month's vacation in Alpine climbing. His wife never hesitated to share this toilsome pleasure; strong and robust, it was just the exercise most fascinating to her energetic nature. The story of her fate is a short one. One morning the daily papers contained a short account of "another frightful accident in the Alps." Mrs. Gabriel and a guide were killed by a mass of falling rock. Dr. Gabriel, though much injured, recovered. On his return to England he gave up all professional work. A ghastly change had taken place. In his haggard face and grey hair, few could recognise the great oculist who had been the picture of strong and energetic manhood. His colleagues and fellow-professors endeavoured to persuade him to return to his practice and hospital work, but in vain. He would see but few friends, and for some time Dr. Benson only was admitted. This excellent man was much alarmed at his condition, but failed to arouse the widower from the despondent state into which he had fallen.

Weeks passed, and still no signs of improvement appeared. Dr. Gabriel's seclusion became even more profound, so that it was with difficulty Dr. Benson could obtain access to him.

Rumours were circulated that the shock of his wife's death and the injuries he himself had sustained had affected his mind, but these reports were emphatically denied by those friends who were successful in obtaining an audience. The household servants, too, declared that beyond his excessive reserve there was nothing unusual in his manner. They said he spent most of his time in his laboratory, where he frequently remained the whole day and the greater part of the night, and was evidently absorbed in an experiment of great interest.

Let me here introduce myself in order to explain the part taken



by me in the events which followed. I will first state that I have no connection whatever with the medical profession. Being of independent means and of a somewhat scientific turn, I have devoted much time to the study of photography, especially those branches so seldom attempted by amateurs, viz., enlarging and reproducing. In this way I have been able to be of service to many eminent histologists and microscopists—including my friend Dr. Benson—men who have no time to register the result of their researches by this means themselves. The work has an indescribable fascination for me; I have studied under the most celebrated professors of photography both in this country and on the Continent, and I think I can say without vain boasting, that I can hold my own against any amateur or professional in this art. By this means I became acquainted with many colleagues of Dr. Gabriel, and from them heard many details of his works.

One night after a meeting of the Histological Society, we were rediscussing the speech of the evening when Dr. Benson, who had been called away an hour or two previously, returned, his genial countenance preternaturally grave and anxious. He soon told us that he had just come from Dr. Gabriel, who had become suddenly and unaccountably stone blind! Such an announcement at once stopped all further discussion on the "cholera bacillus," the subject of the meeting, and Dr. Benson was eagerly questioned for further information. "The case completely baffles me," said the physician. "Dr. Gabriel declares that on awaking this morning, he found that he had entirely lost his sight—he appears totally unable to distinguish light from darkness. I have carefully examined the optic discs with the ophthalmoscope," continued he, "without being able to make out the faintest change in retina; and there are no symptoms which would lead one to believe he had sustained any cerebral lesion. I have never been so puzzled by any case in my life."

Many theories to account for this phenomenon were at once advanced by some of the younger men present, most of them holding that the blindness resulted from mischief set up in the brain by the accident in the Alps. To this, Dr. Benson could not agree, his great experience in these cases leading him to expect symptoms which were conspicuous by their absence in Dr. Gabriel's misfortune.

"There is a remarkable mental condition here," added the doctor, "which, although it does not bear upon the question from a pathological point of view, is as interesting and surprising as it is inexplicable. It is this. Dr. Gabriel, in losing his sight, has also lost all melancholy, all his former depression of spirits; in fact, he has quite returned to his natural cheerful condition. During my short interview he never once expressed any regret at this crowning

calamity, and although fully convinced that he would never see again he appeared in no way distressed."

There were many grave faces and significant nods as Dr. Benson concluded. Poor Gabriel, they believed him mad.

Time proved that neither Dr. Gabriel's extraordinary return of cheerfulness nor his loss of sight was of a transitory nature; both were perfectly incomprehensible. There was one thing, however, evident enough to the uneducated as well as to the professional eye—it was, that in spite of the great improvement in spirits, our friend's health was rapidly and surely failing. This decline was as mysterious as the blindness. Those who believed they had traced the latter to cerebral lesion, the result of the accident, declared the former to be quite in accordance with their diagnosis. Whatever it was, this fact remained, Dr. Gabriel was steadily sinking.

One day a messenger brought me the following letter from Dr. Benson:—

"DEAR A.,

"In a few hours Gabriel will be no more. I have received from him a sealed document, in which, he states, will be found information that may offer some explanation as to the cause of his blindness. He desires a *post-mortem* examination to be made upon his body immediately after death, if possible. He fully believes that something of unparalleled interest will be discovered should the examination be carefully conducted. In order that it may be as complete as possible, he wishes any abnormal discovery to be at once photographed. For many reasons it is undesirable to employ a professional photographer. Knowing that you have much spare time, I venture to feel sure you will assist us in this matter. If you have no other engagement, please hold yourself in readiness to start at a moment's notice.

"In haste,

"Yours sincerely,

"HENRY BENSON."

I readily agreed to give my services whenever they might be required, and prepared such apparatus as I was accustomed to use on similar occasions.

Early one morning Dr. Benson called for me on his way to Gabriel's house. He had just received information that the poor oculist was *in articulo mortis*. We arrived a few minutes before the end. Quietly we entered the darkened chamber. How difficult it was to believe that those intelligent eyes, even in these last moments so lustrous and deep, could be absolutely sightless; wide open, they were turned as if searchingly upon the face of the physician, as with

his fingers lightly on the patient's hand he leaned over the bed. But there was no reflection of the doctor's grave and anxious look—a peaceful smile spread over the handsome features, flickered for a moment, and there remained stereotyped in death.

Sadly we left the room and joined a few professional friends who, like myself, had been invited to attend. Dr. Benson then produced the sealed document mentioned in his letter, and read aloud as follows :

“ My experiences during the past few months have been so abnormal—in every respect so inexplicable and apparently so far beyond the bounds of human reasoning, that, believing I should be regarded as a madman were I to publish them, I earnestly request that the facts which I am about to relate may be hidden from all but those present at the autopsy, should the examination of my dead body fail to bring forth confirmatory evidence. It is now many months since the accident in the Alps severed me from my dear wife. The sunshine of my existence was changed to the darkest gloom of despondency. No twilight of fading health broke the suddenness with which the night fell upon me. My own injuries were not as serious as have been supposed, and I do not believe my present condition is in any way connected with them. The brain concussion and shock impaired my mental faculties in one respect only—I could never perfectly recall my wife's face. For hours I have tried to conjure up her image, to form a dream-picture, without success. Her portraits were to me as likenesses of some other woman. There were her features certainly—the shape and pose of her beautiful head—but not she—not my darling. The phantoms of those long-forgotten, old school-fellow patients, hosts of casual acquaintances would pass before me with maddening distinctness; but the *one* who had made my life of monotony a brief era of happiness, was hidden even from my mind's eye.

“ For a few weeks I returned to professional duties and endeavoured to forget my misfortunes in hard work. Whatever success I achieved in the day was undone at night. Sleep came but fitfully—no dream gave even a shadowy glimpse of the happy past.

“ It was about this time I experienced a remarkable sensation, by what means produced I cannot say. Certain I was that occasionally, in the room, at my side, bending over me, waiting, watching, was my wife's soul, spirit, or whatever the immortal form may be. No physical sign existed, no sound, nothing visible or tangible, yet the conviction was overwhelming. Never a believer in things supernatural, I fought resolutely against the idea, till at length convinced in spite of reason, I devoted all my energies to the study of psychology and its literature, in feeble hope of arriving at the

mystery's solution. Volume after volume I threw aside in disgust. Hundreds of cases somewhat similar to mine I found recorded, and as many ridiculous theories advanced to account for them, but not one that would bear scientific investigation. Who would credit my story? who would not believe me to be the victim of a morbid imagination?

"A clue, however, came at last, and from a most unexpected quarter. Once while sitting in my study, I felt the indescribable sensation slowly stealing over me; all excitement and horror had long passed, for these 'visitations' were now frequent. I only longed once more to behold my beloved wife. I looked up from the book I was reading, vainly seeking the invisible form. The night was far advanced—everything was still, not a stir or rustle disturbed the silence. Presently the sound of a slight splash caused me to glance in the direction of a small globe aquarium placed in a far corner of the room. I was surprised to observe the evident agitation of the golden carp it contained. That they were extremely terrified I detected in a moment, having studied their habits very closely. Yet there was no apparent cause for such excitement. It was impossible that the slight movement in raising my head could produce such an effect. No cat, dog, or other animal was in the apartment. Was it possible that the 'presence' hidden from me was visible to these lower creatures?

"Night after night I carefully watched the tiny aquarium. On each occasion the disturbance amongst its occupants was coincident with the phenomenal sensations!

"Here was food for reflection! a possible means of grasping the grand secret of the supernatural. The task was now to find in what respect the vision of these fish differs from our own.

"Now the sense of sight is the perception of light and shade. Colour is but a part of light, for the ordinary white solar light is a combination of all the colours of the spectrum. Moreover, it is a fact that when light is passed through a prism, and broken up into the beautiful colours of the rainbow, there are rays beyond the red and violet ends which are quite imperceptible to us, but that they do exist can be demonstrated by their effects upon certain chemicals. The sensitive plate of a camera receives them and shows the presence of celestial bodies whose beams have no effect upon the human retina. Thus photographs are taken of suns which have long ceased to shine; kettles of boiling water can be photographed in the dark. Therefore we must admit our own eyes are but very imperfect perceivers. But how about the so-called 'lower animals?' Has not one of our most celebrated living naturalists proved by his experiments upon ants that these insects are clearly sensitive to rays beyond the violet? What they see is probably a colour perfectly

inconceivable to us. Is it not possible that the so-termed 'ghost-seers' may be gifted with retinæ sensitive to these ultra rays? Would not this theory account for many remarkable cases of persons beholding apparitions, and in which circumstantial evidence seems to point to the honesty of those visited? Because we cannot as yet understand these phenomena we call them 'delusions.' Must it ever be beyond the power of science to supply us with a means of increasing our sense of sight in this direction?

"Such were the questions suggested by the splash of a tiny gold fish! To answer them in a practical form was the task I now set myself. I determined to carry out an elaborate series of experiments upon the visual apparatus of fish; taking into consideration the changes light must undergo in passing through the refracting media of the curved glass of the aquarium and the bubbling water it contained. My goal was to see the unseen—to construct an apparatus which should enable the human eye to perceive the ultra rays. Whether I succeeded or no can be proved only upon the dissecting table. Perhaps, after all, I am mad, and the phenomena which I am about to relate are but hallucinations of a morbid mind.

"I do not intend to describe in detail the progress of this novel study, nor to disclose the various discoveries which enabled me to succeed after many weary failures.

"The startling and altogether unsuspected consequences of my success compel me to believe that I have overstepped the moral bounds of science, and that I should be increasing my guilt were I to enable others to follow in my path. It must be sufficient for me to say that the medium I constructed through which I was to behold the dead was, to all appearances, an arrangement of coloured lenses. It was not long before I had an opportunity of testing my discovery. One night I awoke with the consciousness that my wife was present. I even knew that she was bending over me. I could almost imagine her breath upon my cheek. My optical apparatus lay on a table within easy reach—with a palpitating heart I placed it before my eyes. For a moment I was dazzled by a brilliant flash of light; then, clothed in indescribable colours, I beheld the face of my dead wife. To give the very faintest idea of these marvellous hues is utterly impossible. They could no more be imagined than one could conceive a new sense. Nothing in our earthly experience can give the least notion of their enchanting beauty. Yet the face did not appear unnatural—on the contrary, it seemed perfectly real and substantial. It was my beautiful wife transcendently beautiful. Impulsively I sprang towards her, throwing aside the lenses in my ecstasy. They fell upon the floor, shivered to atoms. Yet the brilliant image remained before me in all its loveliness. In the



excitement of the moment this did not seem strange. I was in a semi-delirium.

"How long I continued in this ecstatic state I cannot tell. I remember being aroused by the opening of the bedroom door, and the voice of my valet informing me that it was time to arise. I turned in the direction of the sound but could see nothing except my wife's features. I did not for a moment suspect the truth. I believed my sight was temporarily impaired, as is naturally the case after gazing at an extremely bright object. But before long I awoke to the fact that I was blind to everything but my wife's image. This remained permanently before me, but not in its original hues—still more beautiful tints gradually eclipsed the others, probably their complementary colours. This final apparition has never left me. Whether my lids are closed or open, my wife is always before my eyes. At times I feel her presence, but her voice is dumb for ever.

"It had never occurred to me, during the time I was elaborating my experiment, that the ultra rays might have an injurious effect upon the retina. I now believe that these rays of unusual light have produced a pathological change in this membrane. It is for those who conduct the examination of my remains to prove by actual demonstration the truth of my story."

Dr. Benson laid the paper on the table. Some time elapsed before the impressive silence was broken. Each one present remained absorbed in reflection upon these extraordinary revelations. At last it was suggested that the ghastly object of the meeting should be carried out. This is not the place for me to describe the details of the examination. It is enough to say that as Dr. Gabriel had anticipated, in a part of the retinal membrane of both eyes, what is known as the "visual purple" was found to be permanently bleached, forming two "optograms," or natural (?) photographs, which clearly defined the outline of a beautiful head.

These optograms were immediately enlarged by photography. The two pictures thus obtained were placed together and viewed through an ordinary stereoscope.

On looking through the instrument, as I am doing at this present moment, I see the dim and misty image of a female head, like an unfinished sketch of a beautiful model. It is difficult to believe that it is an actual photograph of a disembodied spirit. Yet such it is, and without doubt a witness to the truth of Dr. Gabriel's story and the success of his experiment.

Dr. Gabriel's death remains a mystery. Nothing was found at the examination which could in any way explain it.

## Let Loose.\*

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'THE DANVERS JEWELS.'

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A FEW years ago I took up architecture, and made a tour through Holland, studying the buildings of that interesting country. I had one companion on this expedition, who has since become one of the leading architects of the day. He was a tall grave man, slow of speech, absorbed in his work, and with a certain quiet power of overcoming obstacles which I have seldom seen equalled. A more careless man as to dress I have rarely met, and yet, in all the heat of July in Holland, I noticed that he never appeared without a high starched collar which had not even fashion to commend it at that time.

I often chaffed him about his splendid collars, and asked him why he wore them, but without eliciting any response. One evening as we were walking back to our lodgings in Middleberg I attacked him for about the thirtieth time on the subject.

"Why on earth do you wear them?" I said.

"You have, I believe, asked me that question many times," he replied, in his slow, precise utterance; "but always on occasions when I was occupied. I am now at leisure, and I will tell you."

And he did.

I have put down what he said, as nearly in his own words as I can remember them.

Ten years ago, I was asked to read a paper on English Frescoes at the Institute of British Architects. I was determined to make the paper as good as I possibly could, down to the slightest details; and I consulted many books on the subject, and studied every fresco I could find. My father, who had been an architect, had left me, at his death, all his papers and note-books on the subject of architecture. I searched them diligently, and found in one of them a slight unfinished sketch of nearly forty years ago, that specially interested me. Underneath was noted, in his clear

\* Since this story was written the author has been told that what was related as a personal experience was partially derived from a written source. Every effort has been made, but in vain, to discover this written source. If, however, it does exist, the author hopes the unintentional plagiarism will be forgiven.

small hand—*Frescoed east wall of crypt. Parish Church. Wet Waste-on-the-Wolds, Yorkshire (viâ Pickering).*”

The sketch had such a fascination for me that at last I decided to go there and see the fresco for myself. I had only a very vague idea as to where Wet Waste-on-the-Wolds was, but I was ambitious for the success of my paper; it was hot in London, and I set off on my long journey not without a certain degree of pleasure, with my dog Brian, a large nondescript brindled creature, as my only companion.

I reached Pickering, in Yorkshire, in the course of the afternoon, and then began a series of experiments on local lines which ended, after several hours, in my finding myself deposited at a little out-of-the-world station within nine or ten miles of Wet Waste. As no conveyance of any kind was to be had, I shouldered my little portmanteau, and set out on a long white road, that stretched away into the distance over the bare, treeless wold. I must have walked for several hours, over a waste of moorland patched with heather, when a doctor passed me, and gave me a lift to within a mile of my destination. The mile was a long one, and it was quite dark by the time I saw the feeble glimmer of lights in front of me, and found that I had reached Wet Waste. I had considerable difficulty in getting any one to take me in; but at last I persuaded the owner of the public-house to give me a bed, and quite tired out, I got into it as soon as possible, for fear he should change his mind, and fell asleep to the sound of a little stream below my window.

I was up early next morning, and inquired directly after breakfast for the way to the clergyman's house, which I found was close at hand. At Wet Waste everything was close at hand. The whole village seemed composed of a straggling row of one-storied grey stone houses, the same colour as the stone walls that separated the few fields enclosed from the surrounding waste, and as the little bridges over the beck that ran down one side of the grey wide street. Everything was grey. The church, the low tower of which I could see at a little distance, seemed to have been built of the same stone; so was the parsonage when I came up to it, accompanied on my way by a mob of rough, uncouth children, who eyed me and Brian, with half-defiant curiosity.

The clergyman was at home, and after a short delay I was admitted. Leaving Brian in charge of my drawing materials I followed the servant into a low panelled room in which at a latticed window a very old man was sitting. The morning light fell on his white head bent low over a litter of papers and books.

“Mr. Er——?” He said looking up slowly, with one finger keeping his place in a book.

"Blake."

"Blake," he repeated after me, and was silent.

I told him that I was an architect; that I had come to study a fresco in the crypt of his church; and asked for the keys.

"The crypt," he said, pushing up his spectacles and peering hard at me. "The crypt has been closed for thirty years. Ever since——" and he stopped short.

"I should be much obliged for the keys," I said again.

He shook his head.

"No," he said. "No one goes in there now."

"It is a pity," I remarked, "for I have come a long way with that one object," and I told him about the paper I had been asked to read, and the trouble I was taking with it.

He became interested. "Ah!" he said, laying down his pen, and removing his finger from the page before him, "I can understand that. I also was young once, and fired with ambition. The lines have fallen to me in somewhat lonely places, and for forty years I have held the cure of souls in this place, where truly I have seen but little of the world, though I myself may be not unknown in the paths of literature. Possibly you may have read a pamphlet, written by myself, on the Syrian version of the Three Authentic Epistles of Ignatius?"

"Sir," I said, "I am ashamed to confess that I have not time to read even the most celebrated books. My one object in life is my art. *Ars longa, vita brevis*, you know."

"You are right, my son," said the old man, evidently disappointed, but looking at me kindly. "There are diversities of gifts, and if the Lord has entrusted you with a talent, look to it. Lay it not up in a napkin."

I said I would not do so if he would lend me the keys of the crypt. He seemed startled by my recurrence to the subject and looked undecided.

"Why not?" he murmured to himself. "The youth appears a good youth. And superstition! What is it but distrust in God!"

He got up slowly, and taking a large bunch of keys out of his pocket opened with one of them an oak cupboard in the corner of the room.

"They should be here," he muttered, peering in; "but the dust of many years deceives the eye. See, my son, if among these parchments there be two keys; one of iron and very large, and the other steel, and of a long and thin appearance."

I went eagerly to help him, and presently found in a back drawer two keys tied together, which he recognised at once.

"Those are they," he said. "The long one opens the first door at the bottom of the steps which go down against the outside wall of the church hard by the sword graven in the wall. The second opens (but it is hard of opening and of shutting) the iron door within the passage leading to the crypt itself. My son, is it necessary to your treatise that you should enter this crypt?"

I replied that it was absolutely necessary.

"Then take them," he said; "and in the evening you will bring them to me again."

I said I might want to go several days running, and asked if he would not allow me to keep them till I had finished my work, but on that point he was firm.

"Likewise," he added, "be careful that you lock the first door at the foot of the steps before you unlock the second, and lock the second also while you are within. Furthermore, when you come out lock the iron inner door as well as the wooden one."

I promised I would do so, and, after thanking him, hurried away, delighted at my success in obtaining the keys. Finding Brian and my sketching materials waiting for me in the porch, I eluded the vigilance of my escort of children by taking the narrow private path between the parsonage and the church which was close at hand, standing in a quadrangle of ancient yews.

The church itself was interesting, and I noticed that it must have arisen out of the ruins of a previous edifice, judging from the number of fragments of stone caps and arches, bearing traces of very early carving, now built into the walls. There were incised crosses, too, in some places, and one especially caught my attention, being flanked by a large sword. It was in trying to get a nearer look at this that I stumbled, and looking down saw at my feet a flight of narrow stone steps, green with moss and mildew. Evidently this was the entrance to the crypt. I at once descended the steps, taking care of my footing, for they were damp and slippery in the extreme. Brian accompanied me, as nothing would induce him to remain behind. By the time I had reached the bottom of the stairs I found myself almost in darkness, and I had to strike a light before I could find the keyhole and the proper key to fit into it. The door, which was of wood, opened inwards fairly easily, although an accumulation of mould and rubbish on the ground outside showed it had not been used for many years. Having got through it, which was not altogether an easy matter, as nothing would induce it to open more than about eighteen inches, I carefully locked it behind me, although I should have preferred to leave it open, as there is to some minds



an unpleasant feeling in being locked in anywhere, in case of a sudden exit seeming advisable.

I kept my candle alight with some difficulty, and after groping my way down a low and of course exceedingly dank passage, came to another door. I noticed that it was of iron, and had a long bolt, which, however, was broken. Without delay I fitted the second key into the lock, and pushing the door open after considerable difficulty, I felt the cold breath of the crypt upon my face. I must own I experienced a momentary regret at locking the second door again as soon as I was well inside, but I felt it my duty to do so. Then, leaving the key in the lock, I seized my candle and looked round. I was standing in a low vaulted chamber with groined roof, cut out of the solid rock. It was difficult to see where the crypt ended, as further light thrown on any point only showed other rough archways or openings, cut in the rock, which had probably served at one time for family vaults. A peculiarity of the Wet Waste crypt, which I had not noticed in other places of that description, was the beautiful arrangement of skulls and bones which were packed about four feet high on either side. The skulls were symmetrically built up to within a few inches of the top of the low archways on my left, and the shin bones were arranged in the same manner on my right. *But the fresco!* I looked round for it in vain. Perceiving at the further end of the crypt a very low and very massive archway, the entrance to which was not filled up with bones, I passed under it, and found myself in a second much smaller chamber. Holding my candle above my head, the first object its light fell upon was—the fresco, and at a glance I saw that it was unique. Setting down some of my things with a trembling hand on a rough stone shelf hard by, which had evidently been a credence table, I examined the work more closely. It was a reredos over what had probably been the altar at the time the priests were proscribed. The fresco belonged to the earliest part of the fifteenth century, and was so perfectly preserved that I could almost trace the limits of each day's work in the plaster, as the artist had dashed it on, and smoothed it out with his trowel. The subject was the Ascension, gloriously treated. I can hardly describe my elation as I stood and looked at it, and reflected that this magnificent specimen of English fresco painting would be made known to the world by myself. Recollecting myself at last, I opened my sketching bag, and, lighting all the candles I had brought with me, set to work.

Brian walked about near me, and though I was not otherwise than glad of his company in my rather lonely position, I wished

several times I had left him behind. He seemed restless, and even the sight of so many bones appeared to exercise no soothing effect upon him. At last, however, after repeated commands, he lay down watchful but motionless on the stone floor.

I must have worked for several hours, and I was pausing to rest my eyes and hands when I noticed for the first time the intense stillness that seemed to surround me. No sound from the outer world reached me. No sound from *me* could reach the outer world. The church clock which had clanged out so loud and ponderously as I went down the steps, had not since sent the faintest whisper of its iron tongue down to me below. All was silent as the grave. This *was* the grave. Those who had come here had indeed gone down into silence. I repeated the words to myself, or rather they repeated themselves to me.

Gone down into silence.

I was awakened from my reverie by a faint sound. I sat still and listened. Bats occasionally frequent vaults and underground places.

The sound continued, a faint, stealthy, rather unpleasant sound. I do not know what kinds of sounds bats make, whether pleasant or otherwise. Suddenly there was a noise as of something falling, a momentary pause—and then—an almost imperceptible but distinct jangle as of a key.

I had left the key in the lock after I had turned it, and I now regretted having done so. I got up, took one of the candles, and went back into the larger crypt, for though I hope I am not made nervous by hearing a noise for which I cannot instantly account, still, on occasions of this kind, I must honestly say I would rather they did not occur. As I came towards the iron door, there was another distinct (I had almost said hurried) sound. The impression on my mind was one of great haste. When I reached the door, and held the candle near the lock to take out the key, I perceived that the other one, which hung by a short string to its fellow, was vibrating slightly. I should have preferred not to find it vibrating, as there seemed no occasion for such a course; but I put them both into my pocket, and turned to go back to my work. As I turned I saw on the ground what had occasioned the louder noise I had heard, namely, a skull which had evidently just slipped from its place on the top of one of the walls of bones, and had rolled almost to my feet. There, disclosing a few more inches of the top of an archway behind, was the place from which it had been dislodged. I stooped to pick it up, but fearing to displace any more skulls by meddling with the pile, and not liking to gather up its scattered teeth, I

let it lie, and went back to my work, in which I was soon so completely absorbed that I was only roused at last by my candles beginning to burn low and go out one after another.

Then, with a sigh of regret, for I had not nearly finished, I turned to go. Poor Brian, who had never quite reconciled himself to the place, was almost beside himself with delight. As I opened the iron door he pushed past me, and a moment later I heard him whining and scratching, and I had almost added beating, against the wooden one. I locked the iron door, and hurried down the passage as quickly as I could, and almost before I had got the other one ajar there seemed to be a rush past me into the open air, and Brian was bounding up the steps and out of sight. As I stopped to take out the key I felt quite deserted and left behind. When I came out once more into the sunlight there was a vague sensation all about me in the air of exultant freedom.

It was quite late in the afternoon, and, after I had sauntered back to the parsonage to give up the keys, I persuaded the people of the public house to let me join in the family meal which was spread out in the kitchen. The inhabitants of Wet Waste were primitive people, with the frank, unabashed manner that flourishes still in lonely places, especially in the wilds of Yorkshire; but I had no idea that, in these days of penny posts and cheap newspapers, such entire ignorance of the outer world could have existed in any corner, however remote, of Great Britain.

When I took one of the neighbour's children on my knee, a pretty little girl with the palest aureole of flaxen hair I had ever seen, and began to draw pictures for her of the birds and beasts of other countries, I was instantly surrounded by a crowd of children, and even grown-up people, while others came to their doorways and looked on from a distance, calling to each other in the strident unknown tongue which I have since discovered goes by the name of "Broad Yorkshire."

The following morning as I came out of my room, I perceived that something was amiss in the village. A buzz of voices reached me as I passed the bar, and in the next house I could hear through the open window a high-pitched wail of lamentation.

The woman who brought me in my breakfast was in tears, and in answer to my questions told me that the neighbour's child, the little girl whom I had taken on my knee the evening before, the pet and plaything of the village, had died in the night.

I felt sorry for the general grief that the little thing's death

seemed to cause, and the uncontrolled wailing of the poor mother took my appetite away.

I hurried off early to my work, calling on my way for the keys, and with Brian for my companion descended once more into the crypt, and drew and measured with an absorption that gave me no time that day to listen for sounds real or fancied. Brian, too, on this occasion seemed quite content, and slept peacefully beside me on the stone floor. When I had worked as long as I could, I put away my books with regret that even then I had not quite finished as I had hoped to do. It would be necessary to come again for a short time on the morrow. When I returned the keys late that afternoon, the old clergyman met me at the door, and asked me to come in and have tea with him.

"And has the work prospered?" he asked as we sat down in the long, low room, into which I had just been ushered, and where he seemed to live entirely.

I told him it had, and showed it to him.

"You have seen the original of course?" I said.

"Once," he replied, gazing fixedly at it. He evidently did not care to be communicative, so I turned the conversation to the age of the church.

"All here is old," he said. "When I was young, forty years ago, and came here because I had no means of mine own, and was much moved to marry at that time, I felt oppressed that all was so old; and that this place was so far removed from the world, for which I had at times longings grievous to be borne; but I had chosen my lot, and with it I was forced to be content. My son, marry not in youth, for love, which truly in that season is a mighty power, turns away the heart from study, and young children break the back of ambition. Neither marry in middle life when the talk of a woman is become a weariness, so, you will not be burdened with a wife in your old age."

I asked if the neighbouring villages were as antiquated as Wet Waste.

"Yes, all about here is old," he repeated. "The paved road leading to Dyke Fens is an ancient park road, made even in the time of the Romans. Dyke Fens which is very near here, a matter but of four or five miles, is likewise old, and forgotten by the world. The Reformation never reached it. It stopped here. And at Dyke Fens they still have a priest and a bell, and bow down before the saints. It is a damnable heresy, and weekly I expound it as such to the people, showing them true doctrine; and I have heard that this same priest has so far yielded himself to the Evil One that he has preached against me as withholding



Gospel truths from my flock ; but I take no heed of it, neither of his pamphlet touching the Clementine Homilies, in which he vainly contradicts that which I have plainly set forth and proven beyond doubt, concerning the word *Asaph*."

The old man was fairly off on his favourite subject, and it was some time before I could get away. As it was he followed me to the door, and I only escaped because the old clerk hobbled up at that moment, and claimed his attention.

The following morning I went for the keys the third and last time. I had decided to leave early the next day. I was tired of Wet Waste, and a certain gloom seemed to my fancy to be gathering over the place. There was a sensation of trouble in the air, as if, although the day was bright and clear, a storm were coming.

This morning to my astonishment the keys were refused to me when I asked for them. I did not however take the refusal as final, and after a little delay I was shown into the room where as usual the clergyman was sitting, or rather on this occasion was walking up and down.

"My son," he said with vehemence, "I know wherefore you have come, but it is of no avail. I cannot lend the keys again."

I replied that, on the contrary, I hoped he would give them to me at once.

"It is impossible," he repeated. "I did wrong, exceeding wrong. I will never part with them again."

"Why not?"

He hesitated, and then said, slowly—

"The old clerk, Abraham Kelly, died last night." He paused and then went on: "The doctor has just been here to tell me of that which is a mystery to him. I do not wish the people of the place to know it, and only to me he has mentioned it, but he has discovered plainly on the throat of the old man, and also, but more faintly on the child's, marks as of strangulation. None but he has observed it, and he is at a loss how to account for it. I, alas! can account for it but in one way, but in one way."

I did not see what all this had to do with the crypt, but to humour the old man, I asked what that way was.

"It is a long story, and haply to a stranger, it may appear but foolishness, but I will even tell it, for I perceive that unless I furnish a reason for withholding the keys you will not cease to entreat me for them.

"I told you at first when you inquired of me concerning the crypt, that it had been closed these thirty years, and so it was. Thirty years ago a certain Sir Roger Despard, even the lord of the manor of Wet Waste and Dyke Fens, the last of his family,



which is now, thank the Lord, extinct, died. He was an evil man of a vile life, neither fearing God nor regarding man, and the Lord appeared to have given him over to the tormentors even in this world, for he suffered many things of his vices, more especially from drunkenness, in which seasons, and they were many, he was as one possessed by seven devils, being an abomination to his household, and a root of bitterness to all, both high and low.

“And at last the cup of his iniquity being full to the brim he came to die, and I went to exhort him on his death-bed, for I heard that terror had come upon him, and that evil imaginations encompassed him so thick on every side, that few of them that were with him could abide in his presence. But when I saw him I perceived that there was no place of repentance left for him, and he scoffed at me and my superstition, even as he lay dying, and swore there was no God and no angel, and all were damned even as he was. And the next day towards evening the pains of death came upon him, and he raved the more exceedingly, inasmuch as he said he was being strangled by the evil one. Now on his table was his hunting knife, and with his last strength he crept and laid hold upon it, no man withstanding him, and swore a great oath that if he went down to burn in hell, he would leave one of his hands behind on earth, and that it would never rest until it had drawn blood from the throat of another, and strangled him, even as he himself was being strangled. And he cut off his own right hand at the wrist, and no man dared go near him to stop him, and the blood went through the floor, even down to the ceiling of the room below, and thereupon he died.

“And they called me in the night, and told me of his oath, and I counselled that no man should speak of it, and I took the dead hand which none had ventured to touch, and I laid it beside him in his coffin; for I thought it better he should take it with him, so that he might have it, if haply some day after much tribulation he should perchance be moved to stretch forth his hands towards God. But the story got spread about, and the people were affrighted, so when he came to be buried in the place of his fathers, he being the last of his family, and the crypt likewise full, I had it closed, and kept the keys myself, and suffered no man to enter therein any more; for truly he was a man of an evil life, and the devil is not yet wholly overcome, nor cast chained into the lake of fire. So in time the story died out, for in thirty years much is forgotten. And when you came and asked me for the keys I was at the first minded to withhold them, but I thought it was a vain superstition, and I perceived that you

do but ask a second time for what is first refused; so I let you have them, seeing it was not an idle curiosity, but a desire to improve the talent committed to you, that led you to require them."

The old man stopped, and I remained silent, wondering what would be the best way to get them just once more.

"Surely, sir," I said at last, "one so cultivated and deeply read as yourself cannot be biassed by an idle superstition."

"I trust not," he replied, "and yet—it is a strange thing that since the crypt was opened two people have died, and the mark is plain upon the throat of the old man, and visible on the young child. No blood was drawn, but the second time the grip was stronger than the first. The third time, perchance——"

"Superstition such as that," I said with authority, "is an entire want of faith in God. You once said so yourself."

I took a high moral tone which is often efficacious with conscientious humble-minded people.

He agreed, and accused himself of not having faith as a grain of mustard seed, but even when I had got him as far as that, I had a severe struggle for the keys. It was only when I finally explained to him that if any malign influence *had* been let loose the first day, at any rate, it was out now for good or evil, and no further going or coming of mine could make any difference, that I finally gained my point. I was young, and he was old; and, being somewhat shaken by what had occurred, he gave in at last, and I wrested the keys from him.

I will not deny that I went down the steps that day with a vague, undefinable repugnance, which was only accentuated by the closing of the two doors behind me. I remembered then, for the first time, the faint jangling of the key, and other sounds which I had noticed the first day, and how one of the skulls had fallen. I went to the place where it still lay. I have already said these walls of skulls were built up so high as to be within a few inches of the top of the low archways that led into more distant portions of the vault. The displacement of the skull in question had left a small hole, just large enough for me to put my hand through. I noticed for the first time, over the archway above it, a carved coat of arms, and the name, now almost obliterated, of Despard. This, no doubt, was the Despard vault. I could not resist moving a few more skulls and looking in, holding my candle as near the aperture as I could. The vault was full. Piled high, one upon another, were old coffins, and remnants of coffins, and strewn bones. I think when I come to die, I would rather go home to the earth, than try to keep up appearances in a vault. The coffin nearest the archway alone

was intact, save for a large crack across the lid. I could not get a ray from my candle to fall on the brass plates, but I felt no doubt this was the coffin of the wicked Sir Roger. I put back the skulls, including the one which had rolled down, and carefully finished my work. I was not there much more than an hour, but I was glad to get away.

If I could have left Wet Waste that day, I should have done so, for I had a totally unreasonable longing to leave the place; but I found that only one train stopped during the day at the station from which I had come, and that it would not be possible to be in time for it that day.

Accordingly I submitted to the inevitable, and wandered about with Brian for the remainder of the afternoon, and until late into the evening, sketching and smoking. The day was oppressively hot, and even after the sun had set across the burnt stretches of the wolds, it seemed to grow very little cooler. Not a breath stirred. In the evening, when I was tired of loitering in the lanes, I went up to my own room, and, after contemplating afresh my finished study of the fresco, I suddenly set to work to write the part of my paper bearing upon it. As a rule I write with difficulty, but that evening words came to me with winged speed, and with them a hovering impression that I must make haste, that I was much pressed for time. I wrote and wrote, until my candles guttered out, and left me trying to finish by the moonlight, which, until I endeavoured to write by it, seemed as clear as day.

I had to put away my MS., and feeling it was too early to go to bed, for the church clock was just counting out ten, I sat down by the open window and leaned out to try and catch a breath of air. It was a lovely night, and as I looked out my nervous haste and hurry of mind died down. The moon was sailing clear and tranquil over a fleckless sky; was touching the rugged village, the mist-dimmed trees, and ghostly wolds beyond, with a glory of her own.

The little stream below my window was not all that a stream should be. In the day time, fleets of unseaworthy refuse constantly hurried down it; it owned to dead kittens in the shallow places; but to-night it looked innocent and clear, under the loving eye of the moon that saw it, not as it was, but as it ought to be.

I sat a long time leaning against the window-sill. The heat was still intense. I am not, as a rule, easily elated or readily cast down, but as I sat that night in the lonely village on the moors, with Brian's head against my knee, how or why I know not, a great depression gradually came upon me.

My mind went back to the crypt and the countless dead who had been laid there. The sight of the goal to which all human life, and strength, and beauty, travel in the end, had not affected me at the time, but now, the very air about me seemed heavy with death.

What was the good, I asked myself, of working and toiling, and grinding down my heart and youth in the mill of long and strenuous effort; seeing that in the grave folly and talent, idleness and labour lie together, and are alike forgotten. Labour seemed to stretch before me till my heart ached to think of it, to stretch before me even to the end of life, and then came, as the recompense of my labour—the grave. Even if I succeeded, if after wearing my life threadbare with toil, I succeeded, what remained to me in the end? The grave. A little sooner, while the hands and eyes were still strong to labour, or a little later when all power and vision had been taken from them; sooner or later only—the *grave*.

I roused myself at last, when the moon came to look in upon me where I sat, and, leaving the window open, I pulled myself together, and went to bed.

I fell asleep almost immediately, but I do not fancy I could have been asleep very long when I was wakened by Brian. He was growling in a low muffled tone, as he sometimes did in his sleep, when his nose was buried in his rug. I called out to him to shut up, and as he did not do so, turned in bed to find my match box or something to throw at him. The moonlight was still in the room, and as I looked at him, I saw him raise his head and evidently wake up. I admonished him, and was just on the point of falling asleep when he began to growl again in a low savage manner that waked me most effectually. Presently he shook himself and got up, and began prowling about the room. I sat up in bed and called to him, but he paid no attention. Suddenly I saw him stop short in the moonlight; he showed his teeth, and crouched down, his eyes following something in the air. I looked at him in horror. Was he going mad? His eyes were glaring and his head moved slightly as if he were following the rapid movements of an enemy. Then with a furious snarl, he suddenly sprang from the ground, and rushed in great leaps across the room towards me, dashing himself against the furniture, his eyes rolling, snatching and tearing wildly in the air with his teeth. I saw he had gone mad. I leaped out of bed, and rushing at him caught him by the throat. The moon had gone behind a cloud, but in the darkness I felt him turn upon me, felt him rise up, and his teeth close in my throat.



I was being strangled. With all the strength of despair I kept my grip of his neck, and dragging him across the room tried to crush in his head against the iron rail of my bedstead. It was my only chance. I felt the blood running down my neck. I was suffocating. After one moment of frightful struggle I beat his head against the bar, and heard his skull give way. I felt him give one strong shudder, a groan, and then I fainted away.

When I came to myself I was lying on the floor, surrounded by the people of the house, my reddened hands still clutching Brian's throat. Some one was holding a candle towards me, and the draught from the window made it flare and waver. I looked at Brian. He was stone dead. The blood from his battered head was trickling slowly over my hands. His great jaw was fixed in something that—in the uncertain light—I could not see.

They turned the light a little.

"Oh God!" I shrieked. "There! Look! look!"

"He's off his head," said some one, and I fainted again.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was ill for about a fortnight without regaining consciousness, a waste of time of which even now I cannot think without poignant regret. When I did recover consciousness I found I was being carefully nursed by the old clergyman and the people of the house. I have often heard the unkindness of the world in general inveighed against, but for my part I can honestly say that I have received many more kindnesses than I really have time to repay. Country people especially are remarkably attentive to strangers in illness.

I could not rest until I had seen the doctor who attended me, and had received his assurance that I should be equal to reading my paper on the appointed day. This pressing anxiety removed, I told him of what I had seen before I fainted the second time. He listened attentively, and then assured me, in a manner that was intended to be soothing, that I was suffering from an hallucination, due, no doubt, to the shock of my dog's sudden madness.

"Did you see the dog after it was dead?" I asked.

He said he did. The whole jaw was covered with blood and foam; the teeth certainly seemed convulsively fixed, but the case being evidently one of extraordinarily virulent hydrophobia, owing to the intense heat, he had had the body buried immediately.

My companion stopped speaking as we reached our lodgings,



and went upstairs. Then, lighting a candle, he slowly turned down his collar.

"You see I have the marks still," he said; "but I have no fear of dying of hydrophobia. I am told such peculiar scars could not have been made by the teeth of a dog. If you look closely you see the pressure of the five fingers. That is the reason why I wear high collars."

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## What is the Right Move?

A PROBLEM OF LIFE IN TERMS OF CHESS.

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"Deep in the heart of the noble man it lies for ever legible that as an invisible just God made him, so will and must God's justice, and this only, were it never so invisible, prosper in all controversies and enterprizes and battles whatsoever."—*Past and Present*.

"My dear boy, you are fogging your mind with that antiquated copy-book maxim, which commences with Honesty and ends with Policy. It reverses the true order of ideas, and, like most proverbs, involves the fallacy of an insufficient induction. As a universal proposition, it is a gross delusion, here, in the City of London, at the latter end of the nineteenth century. You talk of leaving me, because forsooth, I have just told you that I am unable to replace those trust-moneys we were speaking of, and if now called to meet my liabilities I should be, it is admitted, several thousands on the wrong side. But what then? There are hundreds in the City in the same position; scarcely any one knows; I shall retrench; you must put up with a smaller salary, and in time I shall pull through. You are under no liability—not a partner, and your objection to continue with me, merely because the force of circumstances has compelled me to make use of other people's money, is purely morbid."

The speaker was an elderly gentleman, with white hair and of imposing appearance, who twisted his gold eyeglasses throughout the conversation, which took place in the inner sanctum of an eminent firm of City notaries, of which he was the last survivor. Tin boxes and bundles of papers were strewn about, and the very atmosphere was redolent of wealth and respectability.

"But suppose," answered the other, "that you were asked for particulars of trust-investments, or a creditor died or became bankrupt, or the money entrusted to you were required, the rottenness of the whole position must inevitably become exposed. And, to say nothing of the risk, I feel it wrong to be mixed up in a practice tainted with such doings."

"Precisely!" retorted the other. "Let us consider your very respectable scruples. In the first place, it is exceedingly unlikely that these things should happen. My position is so unimpeach-

able that none dream of asking questions. If they do, a wave of the hand, and they apologise. True, circumstances may expose the situation; but we are all liable to accidents, which form the salt of business and add a pleasurable excitement to City life. Besides, look at it from your point of view, what are you to do should you leave me? You can't start for yourself, for I have all the connection; your prospects of earning a livelihood as a clerk in a new situation at your time of life are very remote. What will your wife and child do? I have only to hold up my finger to find a score in your place."

"I think," replied the other, "you should have given me an insight into your position when I told you I was about to marry."

"That would have been premature from my point of view, and is not the question now. Well, I assure you I entertain nothing but the kindest of feelings towards you, and I am advising you solely in your own interest; but, remember, that if we do part it will come to a fight between us, and it will not be I who go to the wall. It will be commonly thought you have been dismissed, and I don't see how you are to remove the impression. On the other hand, I shan't live a great many years, then there will be a fairly assured position for you, however rough it may be on some, who will be much astonished at the amount my personalty will be sworn under. Well, you had better consider matters, and let me know what you will do."

The young man assented, and left the room.

Middle-aged Londoners will remember a City chess-resort extant some twenty years ago. A series of long narrow rooms, on different levels, led from one to another, where, upon sanded floors, old wooden armchairs, flanked tables of age-blackened oak, upon which yard-long clay pipes were distributed for the use of customers; stained windows cast a half light upon the carved work on the walls and ceiling. The place was very old, and, for ought I know, Ben Jonson and Shakespeare may have dallied there in wit combat, and certainly Puritan and Georgian shippers and merchants must have smoked their pipes in its rooms through successive generations. A gorgeous palace now occupies the spot, replete with marble, upholstery, and encaustic tiles, where chess still flourishes, but I never go. The garish splendour overwhelms me, and I miss the dim light of my old-fashioned resort. About the time when this old place vanished, another antiquity also took its departure. I mean the old Guildhall library; it, too, consisted of a range of rambling narrow rooms, darkly-wainscoted, old, dusty, and dirty, but infinitely preferable to its palatial substitute. I suppose want of space made the removal of the library a necessity,

but I could never understand why the corporation must needs destroy the building. Those who knew it can imagine the chess-room.

At the latter our young friend used to play after office hours, and thither he now resorted. He took his seat, sick at heart, in a corner alone, and pondered upon the bewildering dilemma, upon one horn of which he must impale himself. Should he stay with a principal guilty of embezzlement and fraudulent breach of trust, or turn out with a very shadowy prospect of finding employment for himself, and livelihood for wife and child? Presently an old gentleman, with whom he often played chess, appeared at the door, peered in, and, seeing him, shuffled up the room with slow and limping steps, as if his feet were tender. A favourite attitude was standing with both hands stretched forward, resting upon his stick. After the usual greetings they put the chessmen in their places for a game. The chessmen of this establishment were the largest I have ever seen, and the boards corresponded in size. Playing there with men which would have supplied formidable weapons to an adversary, comprised no little bodily as well as mental exertion, and perhaps added an attraction to the place. They have long been superseded by Staunton's natty and now monotonous pattern, and I should be glad to see again my old friends. There are chessmen still at Purssell's rooms resembling them, but not so large.

The old man sat down, blinking at his companion out of brown eyes, whose pupils seemed on the point of disappearing under the upper lids, leaving a crescent of white underneath. His long oily hair hung down in thin black wisps. He smiled over his thick underlip, and was in short a rather shabby, kindly-looking, elderly Hebrew.

The young man flattered himself that he was no mean player, but was greatly tantalised in playing with this adversary, over whom he rarely gained an advantage. The old Israelite did not play what is called the book game, but chose an apparently eccentric and purposeless style, seemingly without object, till the other found his position rendered hopeless by some out-of-the-way move. His favourite piece was the king's bishop's pawn, which, curiously enough, constantly came in the opponent's way, causing hideous entanglements, and though the young man often concentrated attack on this pawn, he could seldom capture it. The old man played quickly and without apparent effort, and his adversary sometimes suspected that when he was allowed to win, his opponent was laughing at him.

The game proceeded, and naturally our young friend played worse than usual. His mind was indeed chiefly brooding over the

hideous revelation so cynically made him, and thinking of his poor young wife, and their little baby boy, who would climb up in his arms, and steady himself by clutching hold of his father's hair, dabbing his little wandering fist into his eye. At length the king's bishop's pawn mated him, notwithstanding his usual struggles to capture it, and the old gentleman remarking that the other was not in his usual form, they desisted from playing, and for a time sat in silence puffing their long clay pipes. Later on, the elder began to talk, and gradually drew from his companion some account of his troubles. He listened to the end, and then knocking out the ashes from his pipe on to the table, said:

"My dear young friend, I have always liked your looks, and am sorry to hear your account, but there is a deal of truth in what your employer says. From what I know of the world,—and that is not a little—he may get through his difficulties, and be admired by the average man of business for his cleverness, and I am sorry to think you are in a very difficult position. However, there is no occasion to lose heart, and you will find that assistance will come from quarters least expected. You are threatened with a bad check, and this move may win or lose you the game, but you know that a pawn may be sometimes stronger than a queen, and with a little courage you may yet win your game; indeed, the chessboard is a picture of our life, and in difficult circumstances I often fancy myself consulting the chessmen, who know more about such matters than you may think." He paused awhile, and then continued, fixing his eyes steadily on those of the young man, who in turn gazed at him half fascinated: "Mere pawn you are, and pawn you must remain, but you shall at least study pawn-life in a different sphere. Imagine yourself to be this pawn," holding one up as he spoke between his finger and thumb. "It has been in as difficult positions as yours before now, and yet it queened in the end."

As he spoke, his form seemed to dilate before the eyes of his companion, whose senses, as it were, retired to an immeasurable distance within his body, and the world outside, of whose existence he was conscious rather by intuition than by sight or hearing, finally vanished into infinity.

"Eh! dear me, where am I?" he exclaimed, as his consciousness returned.

It was certainly the same room, but how vast it had grown; and he found himself alone, and seated on what must have been the edge of the table, with his legs hanging over an abyss. The tables presented huge expanses, vanishing in converging lines into the distance. His coffee-cup had grown into a huge vat or



tun, into which he could just peer by standing on tip-toe and grasping the edge with both hands. A lump of sugar fallen by its side, was now a block, from which a statue might have been carved, and an inexplicable hollow tube, long as a scaffold pole, proved to be the stem of a tobacco pipe. All the lights were out, yet he was not in darkness. Several yards away was a large dais or structure elevated about two feet from the table, and paved with black and white slabs. There were the chessmen upon it as large as himself. They stood silent and motionless, but there was a look of intelligence in their heads. Why! it was nothing but one of the chessboards which had grown with the size of the room—or had he diminished? He cannot tell to this day. His principal feeling was curiosity to see what was going on, and as he approached the board, the clock struck, and he heard the sound of music, upon which the chessmen suddenly began to stir and to change, and then ranged themselves into their two lines, moving to the music with military precision, and saluting one another as they met. There were four knights in plate armour, four bishops with lawn and crozier, kings, queens, and castles, and a crowd of peasants of all descriptions, among whom, dressed as one of the daintiest of maidens, he recognised his old friend the white king's bishop's pawn. The set was complete save one pawn, and an imperious summons, which he felt no power to disobey, impelled him to occupy the vacant place, and, looking round, he found himself differing in no respect from his companion pawns. The kings and the pieces treated him with contempt, but the pawns hailed him as a brother, and the white king's bishop's pawn smiled a recognition from the opposite army. Was it fancy, or did the black king strongly resemble the old man?

Presently, a note of the music, and he was summoned to make the first move of the game, and found he had no volition but to obey. His advance was answered by the enemy. It was not a game he had ever seen before, and was played so rapidly that it was rather a dance than a game at chess. Before he had time to accustom himself to the novel crowd by which he was surrounded, and prevented from comprehending the scheme of the game, he felt a light tap on the shoulder, and with a smile and a curtesy the white king's bishop's pawn informed him that he was her prisoner, and, with strange feeling of defeat and mortification, he found himself retiring from the game before it had well begun. He walked off the board and watched the play from the outside. Presently, the same pawn who had captured him came tripping across the board, and stepping off it, sat down by the side of her

prisoner, on the edge of the board which formed a convenient bench. She looked up sideways with a smile, and began :

"I am taken soon after you, you see, and you are avenged, so we have time for a chat while the game continues. We don't need an introduction since we have so long known one another, and I have often wished to speak, but you never came here before to play with us in the hours when we come to life. You loom so large up above us, and I have so longed to know who and what you are."

He wondered what his wife would have said, could she have seen him so intimately greeted by this rather theatrically attired damsel.

"I am delighted," he replied, as gallantly as he could, "and your company more than compensates for my capture; but how comes it that you are so soon taken? My experience is that no power on earth can take you."

"I am sorry to have given you so much trouble now and in the past," she replied, "but may we not be some of those things which are outside of your philosophy?"

"It is from the heavenly region certainly that you hail," he replied. "But do you not find it wearisome to be so soon out of"—he was going to say employment, but substituted "the game?"

"No," she replied, "I am only a pawn, moved by some one else, and if I don't play in this game, I shall perhaps become queen in the next. But what are you, and how do you come here? Tell me about yourself."

"Well, I suppose I too am a pawn elsewhere, and if I am not out of the game just yet, I am seriously threatened by another piece, and am wondering what move I ought to make. But how I came here is as much a puzzle to me as it can possibly be to you. Perhaps you can tell me who is the black king."

"I must not tell you that," she answered, "but you say you do not know what move you ought to make. Do you then make the moves yourselves in your game? Are they not dictated to you by some one else, as with us?"

Ideas of foreknowledge, fate, and free-will passed through the young man's mind as he answered :

"I am not quite sure about that, but it certainly does appear as if the choice of my next move rested with me."

"And does your next move decide your game?" she asked.

"It has very serious consequences to me and to others which you can hardly appreciate."

"Have you a bad game?"

"Very much so, I am afraid."

"Can you not resign and begin another?"

"We cannot resign our game so easily as you can; and if we could, we are not sure that we should quite like the next, or whether there is another at all."

"Don't you play one game after another, as we do?" she asked.

"We really know nothing but our one game. Some of us think we do, others say that after one game we cease to play altogether; and others again, that afterwards we are rewarded and punished for our good and bad moves; but not any one of us can tell for certain."

"And how did you get into your present position?" she asked; "have you been playing badly?"

"My position is the result of wrong moves made by another piece—I am not conscious of any such on my part."

"That is very hard that you should suffer for another's bad play," she answered; "but does not the player who is moving you take care that all the pieces make the right moves?"

"That is another thing we cannot tell," he replied. "We do not know, as I said, whether we are being moved or whether we move ourselves."

"Perhaps the player moves you badly, as you often move us amiss," she went on.

"Some of us have a suspicion to that effect," he answered, "and others think that there is one player who wishes well to us, and another ill."

"And if bad moves are made by one it is another who suffers for it?" she asked. "That is very singular. If our players make a bad move, they lose credit, not we. Are you rewarded for your good moves?"

"That is also hard to say; some of us think yes, others that our good actions will benefit the invisible choir who come after us, and similarly will suffer for our evil deeds."

"That is small consolation to you," she answered. "You appear to me to be a most remarkable race of beings, chiefly engaged in injuring one another, and very ignorant about yourselves. I would much rather be a chess pawn."

"True," he agreed; "but do you know much more about yourselves?"

"Why, yes, we know all about ourselves; here we have been and here we shall continue, playing our games, and that is all. What more would you have?"

"Do you often play?"

"We play every night—one game—when no one else is by, and are working out the invincible opening to which there is no defence. When we have discovered it our task will be over, and the game of chess will vanish. In the daytime we allow you to move us about, and are vastly amused by your blunders. When this game is over I shall have to wish you good-night."

"You would probably be surprised then to hear that you were all made by one of us."

"Impossible!" she answered; "but it will be delightful if you can tell me all about ourselves."

"And yet it is true."

"You must be very good and clever beings," she replied; "wiser than ever I could have imagined, for we are made so well and we stand so straight, and our lot is so pleasant."

"And yet we often play you badly."

"Yes, that is true too. You are the strangest mixture. And did you make yourselves, as you made us?" she suddenly asked.

"No, certainly not."

"Then who did make you?"

"Well, really! you start the most insoluble of problems; that, again, I cannot tell you, or whether any one made us; we have different theories on the subject."

"Dear me! perhaps whoever made you is as much wiser than you think, as you may be wiser than I have thought you. After all, you know so little about matters, I don't see how to advise you what move you are to make. What are the alternatives?"

"Either I must associate with one whose moves I think wrong, or I must leave him, with a very uncertain idea of what will happen in the future."

"That is to say, as far as I understand, you must either make a move not in accordance with the rules of your game, or you must make a move without knowing what will be the result."

"That is about it; but the second alternative may be attended with very unpleasant results which do not occur in your game."

"But it is a move according to your rules?"

"Yes, I cannot say that it is not."

"And what is the penalty if you make a false move?"

"That is also uncertain: sometimes there is a penalty, sometimes there appears to be none, but some of us think the penalty will be suffered in our next game."

"Well," she said, "it appears to me that in truth you don't know the result of any of your moves, and the only rule you can have is to move according to rule."



"It is very easy for you to say so who do not know the unpleasant results that may follow."

"Ah! you have so little faith."

"How can you possibly know that?"

"Why, have you not often played us, and do you think we learn nothing of your characters? You often lose the game from mere fear of your opponent; and if we could only speak, how often could we show you the better game. But tell me, if I refused to move according to rule, what would you do with me?"

"I should have turned you into a draughtsman, or condemned you to play eternal 'skittles.'"

"What an awful fate!" she whispered, with a shudder.

"But now that I know more about you," he continued, "I should send you for further investigation to the Society for Psychical Research."

A look of interrogation.

"Ah, you won't understand what I mean; but I can only answer your question by saying that those who have power over you would find the means of making you do right, my Socratic friend. And, indeed, I suppose that applies to myself also."

"It is all very puzzling," she answered. "I am sorry you can't tell me more about yourselves and us. But see, the game is nearly over. Black will be mated in eleven moves, and I must say good-bye. I hope I shall see you again. Keep to your rules, and perhaps you will come back to us a king."

As she spoke, the music sounded the mate, and immediately the stir and sound of animation began to die away. The pieces stiffened again into chessmen, and the young man watched the fair face of his companion fading into a wooden block. Before she was quite unrecognisable he heard a faint "Adieu! Observe the rules."

"Well, have you had a comfortable nap?" was the next sound that greeted him in harsher accents, and looking round, he saw the old gentleman surveying him with a queer mocking smile of interrogation. The chessmen were lying about in their usual disarray, and everything was as of custom. The young man was too bewildered to say much, and could learn nothing from his companion, who baffled his inquiries, and soon remarked that it was time to be going home, and they parted. One result of our young friend's adventure into chessland was that next day he took leave of his old employer.

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## John Charrington's Wedding.

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No one ever thought that May Forster would marry John Charrington; but he thought differently, and things which John Charrington intended had a queer way of coming to pass. He asked her to marry him before he went up to Oxford. She laughed and refused him. He asked her again next time he came home. Again she laughed, tossed her dainty blonde head, and again refused. A third time he asked her; she said it was becoming a confirmed bad habit, and laughed at him more than ever.

John was not the only man who wanted to marry her: she was the belle of our village coterie, and we were all in love with her more or less; it was a sort of fashion, like masher collars or Inverness capes. Therefore we were as much annoyed as surprised when John Charrington walked into our little local Club—we held it in a loft over the saddler's, I remember—and invited us all to his wedding.

“Your wedding?”

“You don't mean it?”

“Who's the happy fair? When's it to be?”

John Charrington filled his pipe and lighted it before he replied. Then he said—

“I'm sorry to deprive you fellows of your only joke—but Miss Forster and I are to be married in September.”

“You don't mean it?”

“He's got the mitten again, and it's turned his head.”

“No,” I said, rising, “I see it's true. Lend me a pistol someone—or a first-class fare to the other end of Nowhere. Charrington has bewitched the only pretty girl in our twenty-mile radius. Was it mesmerism, or a love-potion, Jack?”

“Neither, sir, but a gift you'll never have—perseverance—and the best luck a man ever had in this world.”

There was something in his voice that silenced me, and all chaff of the other fellows failed to draw him further.

The queer thing about it was that when we congratulated Miss Forster, she blushed and smiled, and dimpled, for all the world as though she were in love with him, and had been in love with him all the time. Upon my word, I think she had. Women are strange creatures.

We were all asked to the wedding. In Brixham every one who was anybody knew everybody else who was any one. My sisters were, I truly believe, more interested in the *trousseau* than the bride herself, and I was to be best man. The coming marriage was much canvassed at afternoon tea-tables, and at our little Club over the saddler's, and the question was always asked: "Does she care for him?"

I used to ask that question myself in the early days of their engagement, but after a certain evening in August I never asked it again. I was coming home from the Club through the churchyard. Our church is on a thyme-grown hill, and the turf about it is so thick and soft that one's footsteps are noiseless.

I made no sound as I vaulted the low lichened wall, and threaded my way between the tombstones. It was at the same instant that I heard John Charrington's voice, and saw her face. May was sitting on a low flat gravestone with the full splendour of the western sun upon her *mignonne* face. Its expression ended, at once and for ever, any question of her love for him; it was transfigured to a beauty I should not have believed possible, even to that beautiful little face.

John lay at her feet, and it was his voice that broke the stillness of the golden August evening.

"My dear, my dear, I believe I should come back from the dead if you wanted me!"

I coughed at once to indicate my presence, and passed on into the shadow fully enlightened.

The wedding was to be early in September. Two days before I had to run up to town on business. The train was late, of course, for we are on the South-Eastern, and as I stood grumbling with my watch in my hand, whom should I see but John Charrington and May Forster. They were walking up and down the unfrequented end of the platform, arm in arm, looking into each other's eyes, careless of the sympathetic interest of the porters.

Of course I knew better than to hesitate a moment before burying myself in the booking-office, and it was not till the train drew up at the platform, that I obtrusively passed the pair with my Gladstone, and took the corner in a first-class smoking-carriage. I did this with as good an air of not seeing them as I could assume.

I pride myself on my discretion, but if John were travelling alone I wanted his company. I had it.

"Hullo, old man," came his cheery voice as he swung his bag into my carriage; "here's luck; I was expecting a dull journey!"

"Where are you off to?" I asked, discretion still bidding me turn my eyes away, though I saw, without looking, that hers were red-rimmed.

"To old Branbridge's," he answered, shutting the door and leaning out for a last word with his sweetheart.

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't go, John," she was saying in a low, earnest voice. "I feel certain something will happen."

"Do you think I should let anything happen to keep me, and the day after to-morrow our wedding-day?"

"Don't go," she answered, with a pleading intensity which would have sent my Gladstone on to the platform and me after it. But she wasn't speaking to me. John Charrington was made differently; he rarely changed his opinions, never his resolutions.

He only stroked the little ungloved hands that lay on the carriage door.

"I must, May. The old boy's been awfully good to me, and now he's dying I must go and see him, but I shall come home in time for——" the rest of the parting was lost in a whisper and in the rattling lurch of the starting train.

"You're sure to come?" she spoke as the train moved.

"Nothing shall keep me," he answered; and we steamed out. After he had seen the last of the little figure on the platform he leaned back in his corner and kept silence for a minute.

When he spoke it was to explain to me that his godfather, whose heir he was, lay dying at Peasmarsh Place, some fifty miles away, and had sent for John, and John had felt bound to go.

"I shall be surely back to-morrow," he said, "or, if not, the day after, in heaps of time. Thank Heaven, one hasn't to get up in the middle of the night to get married nowadays!"

"And suppose Mr. Branbridge dies?"

"Alive or dead I mean to be married on Thursday!" John answered, lighting a cigar and unfolding the *Times*.

At Peasmarsh station we said "good-bye," and he got out, and I saw him ride off; I went on to London, where I stayed the night.

When I got home the next afternoon, a very wet one, by the way, my sister greeted me with—

"Where's Charrington?"

"Goodness knows," I answered testily. Every man, since Cain, has resented that kind of question.

"I thought you might have heard from him," she went on, "as you're to give him away to-morrow."

"Isn't he back?" I asked, for I had confidently expected to find him at home.

"No, Geoffrey,"—my sister Fanny always had a way of jumping to conclusions, especially such conclusions as were least favourable to her fellow-creatures—"he has not returned, and, what is more, you may depend upon it he won't. You mark my words, there'll be no wedding to-morrow."

My sister Fanny has a power of annoying me which no other human being possesses.

"You mark my words," I retorted with asperity, "you had better give up making such a thundering idiot of yourself. There'll be more wedding to-morrow than ever you'll take the first part in." A prophecy which, by the way, came true.

But though I could snarl confidently to my sister, I did not feel so comfortable when, late that night, I, standing on the doorstep of John's house, heard that he had not returned. I went home gloomily through the rain. Next morning brought a brilliant blue sky, gold sun, and all such softness of air and beauty of cloud as go to make up a perfect day. I woke with a vague feeling of having gone to bed anxious, and of being rather averse to facing that anxiety in the light of full wakefulness.

But with my shaving-water came a note from John which relieved my mind and sent me up to the Forsters with a light heart.

May was in the garden. I saw her blue gown through the hollyhocks as the lodge gates swung to behind me. So I did not go up to the house, but turned aside down the turfed path.

"He's written to you too," she said, without preliminary greeting, when I reached her side.

"Yes, I'm to meet him at the station at three, and come straight on to the church."

Her face looked pale, but there was a brightness in her eyes, and a tender quiver about the mouth that spoke of renewed happiness.

"Mr. Branbridge begged him so to stay another night that he had not the heart to refuse," she went on. "He is so kind, but I wish he hadn't stayed."

I was at the station at half-past two. I felt rather annoyed with John. It seemed a sort of slight to the beautiful girl who loved him, that he should come as it were out of breath, and with

the dust of travel upon him to take her hand, which some of us would have given the best years of our lives to take.

But when the three o'clock train glided in, and glided out again having brought no passengers to our little station, I was more than annoyed. There was no other train for thirty-five minutes; I calculated that, with much hurry, we might just get to the church in time for the ceremony; but, oh, what a fool to miss that first train! What other man could have done it?

That thirty-five minutes seemed a year, as I wandered round the station reading the advertisements and the time-tables, and the company's bye-laws, and getting more and more angry with John Charrington. This confidence in his own power of getting everything he wanted the minute he wanted it was leading him too far. I hate waiting. Everyone does, but I believe I hate it more than anyone else. The three thirty-five was late, of course.

I ground my pipe between my teeth and stamped with impatience as I watched the signals. Click. The signal went down. Five minutes later I flung myself into the carriage that I had brought for John.

"Drive to the church!" I said, as someone shut the door. "Mr. Charrington hasn't come by this train."

Anxiety now replaced anger. What had become of the man? Could he have been taken suddenly ill? I had never known him have a day's illness in his life. And even so he might have telegraphed. Some awful accident must have happened to him. The thought that he had played her false never—no, not for a moment, entered my head. Yes, something terrible had happened to him, and on me lay the task of telling his bride. I tell you, I almost wished the carriage would upset and break my head so that someone else might tell her, not I, who—but that's nothing to do with the story.

It was five minutes to four as we drew up at the churchyard gate. A double row of eager on-lookers lined the path from lych-gate to porch. I sprang from the carriage and passed up between them. Our gardener had a good front place near the door. I stopped.

"Are they waiting still, Byles?" I asked, simply to gain time, for of course I knew they were by the waiting crowd's attentive attitude.

"Waiting, sir? No no, sir, why it must be over by now."

"Over! Then Mr. Charrington's come?"

"To the minute, sir; must have missed you somehow, and, I say, sir," lowering his voice, "I never see Mr. John the least bit so afore, but my opinion is he's been drinking pretty free. His



clothes was all dusty and his face like a sheet. I tell you I didn't like the looks of him at all; and the folks inside are saying all sorts of things. You'll see, something's gone very wrong with Mr. John, and he's tried liquor. He looked like a ghost, and in he went with his eyes straight before him, with never a look or a word for none of us; him that was always such a gentleman!"

I had never heard Byles make so long a speech. The crowd in the churchyard were talking in whispers and getting ready rice and slippers to throw at the bride and bridegroom. The ringers were ready with their hands on the ropes to ring out the merry peal as the bride and bridegroom should come out.

A murmur from the church announced them; out they came, Byles was right. John Charrington did not look himself. There was dust on his coat, his hair was disarranged. He seemed to have been in some row, for there was a black mark above his eyebrow. He was deathly pale. But his pallor was not greater than that of the bride, who might have been carved in ivory—dress, veil, orange blossoms and all.

As they passed out the ringers stooped—there were six of them—and then, on the ears expecting the gay wedding peal, came the slow tolling of the passing bell.

A thrill of horror at so foolish a jest from the ringers passed through us all. But the ringers themselves dropped the ropes and fled like rabbits down the belfry stairs. The bride shuddered, and grey shadows came about her mouth, but the bridegroom led her on down the path where the people stood with the handfuls of rice; but the handfuls were never thrown, and the wedding-bells never rang. In vain the ringers were urged to remedy their mistake: they protested with many whispered expletives that they would see themselves further first.

In a hush like the hush in the chamber of death the bridal pair passed into their carriage and its door slammed behind them.

Then the tongues were loosed. A babel of anger, wonder, conjecture from the guests and the spectators.

"If I'd seen his condition, sir," said old Forster to me as we drove off, "I would have stretched him on the floor of the church, sir, by Heaven I would, before I'd have let him marry my daughter!"

Then he put his head out of the window.

"Drive like fury," he cried to the coachman; "don't spare the horses."

He was obeyed. We passed the bride's carriage. I forbore to look at it, and old Forster turned his head away and swore. We reached home before it.

We stood in the hall doorway, in the blazing afternoon sun, and in about half a minute we heard wheels crunching the gravel. When the carriage stopped in front of the steps old Forster and I ran down.

“Great Heaven, the carriage is empty! And yet——”

I had the door open in a minute, and this is what I saw—

No sign of John Charrington; and of May, his wife only a huddled heap of white satin lying half on the floor of the carriage and half on the seat.

“I drove straight here, sir,” said the coachman, as the bride’s father lifted her out; “and I’ll swear no one got out of the carriage.”

We carried her into the house in her bridal dress and drew back her veil. I saw her face. Shall I ever forget it? white, white and drawn with agony and horror, bearing such a look of terror as I have never seen since except in dreams. And her hair, her radiant blonde hair, I tell you it was white like snow.

As we stood, her father and I, half mad with the horror and mystery of it, a boy came up the avenue—a telegraph boy. They brought the orange envelope to me. I tore it open.

*“Mr. Charrington was thrown from his horse on his way to the station at half-past one. Killed on the spot!”*

And he was married to May Forster in our parish church at half-past three, in presence of half the parish.

*“I shall be married, dead or alive!”*

What had passed in that carriage on the homeward drive? No one knows—no one will ever know. Oh, May! oh, my dear!

Before a week was over they laid her beside her husband in our little churchyard on the thyme-covered hill—the churchyard where they had kept their love-trysts.

Thus was accomplished John Charrington’s wedding.

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## The Strange Story of Beethoven Koffsky.

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I HAD known Beethoven Koffsky for some years, and had always been interested in him and his marvellous gift of music. He was a curious, half-starved-looking creature, jerky and voluble of speech, addicted to gesture, sensitive, enthusiastic, ridiculously vain, and as guileless and easily duped as a child. This last characteristic accounted, perhaps, for his never getting on, in spite of his genius. He was a composer—and a very fine composer, too—but he seemed quite unable to impress publishers with a right view of his talents. Occasionally he would get a song published, or a tuneless and inferior pianoforte piece, but after a day or two of affluence he would always sink into his habitual slough of poverty. Koffsky's mother had been an English woman, and from her he told me he had inherited his singular genius and passion for music; it was she too who had insisted on bestowing upon him the somewhat ambitious name of Beethoven. Koffsky had adored his mother, and could never speak of her without tears. So far as I could learn, she had never known a happy or a comfortable moment from the day of her runaway marriage with Koffsky *père*, and I was quite glad to learn that the poor creature had been at peace now for many years under the scanty earth of a crowded London graveyard. Koffsky rarely mentioned his father, and all I had ever gathered about this parent was that he was a Pole and still lived in some remote corner of his native land, whence his son evidently did not care to unearth him. I had my own idea of what kind of man the elder Koffsky had been, and privately thought that it was from him Beethoven had inherited his long, matted hair, his wild, brilliant eyes and his rooted aversion to soap and collars. Not that I blamed Koffsky for a constitutional leaning towards dirt; he was a Bohemian, and dirt is as dear to the Bohemian as his tub to the military man or his club to the swell.

Of course Koffsky was married: he was just the kind of incompetent, improvident, incapable kind of man who was

bound to marry and burden the nation with a family of paupers. I was very sorry for his wife. She was a poor little nursery governess when Koffsky first met her, with five disagreeable children to take care of. I suppose she thought any life would be preferable to the one she was leading, and Koffsky, though grimy, was a good-looking man, and extremely interesting and even attractive when considered in the light of a musical genius. Once married, I am not sure that Mrs. Koffsky continued long to think that she had improved her position. Mary was a pretty, delicate-looking little creature, and the life she led was too hard for her.

In the course of four years the Koffskys had as many children, and the wife's hands were very full. I often dropped in at their miserable little lodgings, and it was a pitiful sight to see poor little Mary struggling with those four singularly unmanageable children. She worked hard to bring them up in her own ideas of cleanliness, but their Polish blood and their father's example were too much for her—soap and water held no place in the young Koffskys' scheme of life, and even the baby kicked and screamed when the long-suffering mother endeavoured to wash its face.

"The children are too much for me, Mr. Blencowe," said Mrs. Koffsky ruefully; "there's too much Beethoven in them."

She was right; there was decidedly too much Beethoven in them.

And yet Koffsky was a very good fellow: he was devoted to his wife and children, and would do anything for them—short of getting on in the world. That was too much to ask of him. The poor fellow was a born dupe—not a day passed that he was not cheated by somebody. But what a genius he was! He would improvise by the hour together, on either violin or piano, weird music that made one's blood creep and curdle—or at least I could imagine that the blood of a less prosaic person than myself might have gone through that singular process. Then Koffsky became a changed being: his dark hair thrown back from his pale brow, his wild eyes shining with a curious light of passion and inspiration, his whole frame quivering with emotion—he seemed no longer Koffsky. At such moments music claimed him entirely for her own; he forgot the world he lived in and appeared to ignore his nearest and dearest. I had an example of this one day when I went to see the Koffskys. The eldest child, an urchin of five years old, with his finger in his mouth and his pinafore in a state of dirt only to be achieved by a Koffsky, opened the door and pointed mutely upstairs. I skilfully avoided colliding with one child who was sliding down the banisters, by a

desperate leap managed to clear the baby which was crawling up the stairs, and arrived safely in the little sitting-room. At night this became the children's sleeping room, but during the day Mrs. Koffsky sewed there and always kept it neat and tidy, in the teeth of what difficulties Heaven and herself could alone know. Koffsky was seated at the piano (the one article in that household that had never visited the pawnbroker's), hammering at a tune which he repeated over and over again with every possible variation of chord and key. He took no notice of me, and when I wished him good day he merely rolled vacant eyes upon me and went on with his composition. I addressed him once or twice with the same unsatisfactory result. I was in the middle of a last effort to rouse him, when Mrs. Koffsky came in, furtively smoothing her hair and trying not to look as though she had just slipped into a tidy gown.

"It's no use speaking to him, Mr. Blencowe," she said, nodding towards the rapt Koffsky. "He's hammering out a bit of his opera—he's mad after that opera. He's in it now—he's not here; it's no more use talking to him than if he were dead and buried."

"Don't you find that a trifle trying?" I asked.

"I do indeed," said the poor woman: "Beethoven lives for music—not for me. He lives in a dream: if I cook him a nice dinner he doesn't know what he's eating, or if his mutton's hot or cold. Beethoven is a genius, but he's a terrible man to have for a husband. He's worse than usual now, for his opera's nearly finished, and he thinks it will make his fortune."

"What do you think?" I said.

She smiled sadly.

"It's a beautiful opera, and I daresay it will make somebody's fortune—but not Beethoven's."

"Do the children inherit his talents?"

"I hope to God they do not," she said solemnly. "I had rather see my children dead and in their coffins than have them musicians like their father. Better they should be dead and at peace than that they should suffer as my poor Beethoven suffers. He never rests, he rarely sleeps, and this dreadful composition when he has a fit of it, shatters him like an illness. Does he look like a happy man?" she asked, pointing to the dreamer, who was still torturing the keys into unwilling harmonies.

He certainly did not: there were great drops of perspiration on his forehead, and his lips were drawn and livid.

"He does not know we are here," said Mrs. Koffsky; "I will show you how lost he is to everything but music." She touched



his arm and called him gently by name. He looked at her with the same vacant glare he had bestowed on me and shook his head impatiently. "Beethoven," she repeated, with a little tremble in her voice, "won't you speak to me?"

This time he did not look at her: his long, thin fingers never ceased their voyage up and down the keys.

"Go away," he said; "I don't know you—I don't want you—go away—you disturb me."

"You see?" said Mrs. Koffsky sadly; "it is a little hard, is it not?"

A fortnight later, as I sat in my rooms, ploughing away at common law, and feeling more sympathy with the breakers of laws than the makers of them, Koffsky darted in, in a wild state of excitement.

"What's up?" I asked, glad of any interruption in my uncongenial task.

"I have finished my opera," he cried, "at last! At last! And I have succeeded gloriously. I have almost overtaken my ideal! I have put the music of my dreams on paper. Listen." He sat down to my piano. "My libretto is founded on the life of our glorious patriot, Kosciusko. This is his battle song—his death song."

He struck a few stirring chords and burst into a wild melody. It was a fine song, and Koffsky's rich baritone voice did full justice to the music.

"There— isn't that grand! isn't that glorious!" he cried, turning his rapt face towards me. "It is Beethoven Koffsky's masterpiece."

I couldn't help smiling at the man's naïve vanity, but he was quite right—it was grand music. I told him so, and his pale face glowed with pleasure. He seized my hand and shook it violently.

"Ah," he cried, "I knew you were a musician at heart! I knew you had a soul under all your English starch! *You* can appreciate me! *You* know genius when you see it—when it speaks and cries to you! *You* know that Beethoven Koffsky is a genius!"

His words and his extravagant gestures were laughable.

"Ah, you smile!" he cried. "But why should you smile? What I say is true—it is not my vanity—it is God's own truth; and why should I fear to say it? My music is beautiful: if I could but get it heard, all the world would know that it is beautiful—mine would be a name for all time!"

He started up and paced the room wildly.

"But I cannot get it heard!" he cried, in heart-broken accents. "My beautiful opera that would delight the world, no

one will look at it, no one will take it! it will never be heard—never! I am poor and unknown—no one will understand me—no one will believe that I have music in me, and my darling opera, my soul's child—it will perish—it is born only to die—to die unknown, unloved! Oh my God! it is hard to bear!”

He covered his face with his hands, and I could see the tears start between his thin fingers. If ever I was sorry for a man that man was Beethoven Koffsky. I tried to comfort him; I suggested that his opera might yet be taken, but his present mood was strong upon him and he would not be comforted.

“No,” he said brokenly, “no, without money nothing can be done. My opera will never be heard, never! and meanwhile, we shall starve. I have eaten nothing to-day, and my wife and the children—they are hungry. And I can do nothing! I can't make money—I can only make music!”

“Give it up and turn your hand to something else,” I suggested. He turned upon me fiercely.

“Give up music? throw away my God-given genius? What do you think of me? I cannot! I tell you I cannot! I only live for music; I belong to her. The world seems only half real to me, but music is real and strong; she draws me on—and when she calls I must follow.

He resumed his seat at the piano.

“Listen, this is Kosciusko's song to his loved one.”

It was a beautiful and passionate love-song, and Koffsky sang it as though inspired.

By the time he had finished it, he had evidently forgotten my presence, and went playing and singing dreamily on, for more than an hour. When at last he rose, his despondent mood had vanished.

“Ah, it is a glorious opera!” he cried. “It will take the world by storm! Some day you will hear of it, Mr. Blencowe, and then you will be proud of your poor friend, Beethoven Koffsky.”

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A few days after my last interview with Koffsky, I was fortunate enough to obtain a six months' engagement as bear leader. The Honourable Herbert Algernon Cecil FitzTaltork was only eighteen, but he possessed an obstinacy beyond his years, and an immovable ignorance that no cramming could shake. I led my growling and refractory charge through Italy and Switzerland, failing systematically to implant the faintest knowledge of anything in the singularly unproductive soil he called his brain; and I was heartily thankful when we went our separate ways, the

honourable Bertie bound for his parents' "mansion" in Berkshire, I for my diggings in the Temple.

I had not forgotten poor Koffsky all this time, and I had not been back many days, before I paid him a visit. The same thumb-sucking, dirty-aproned urchin opened the door for me, but I noticed that his frock was black, and unusually respectable. There was a singular absence of noise in the house; there were no children sliding down the banisters, no baby crawling on the stairs, no article of childish apparel airing on the landing. What had happened? Mrs. Koffsky put down her sewing and rose as I entered. The poor little woman's life had never been a very happy one, but she had always managed to keep bright and cheerful: now, as she stood looking at me, paler and thinner for her black dress, I thought I had never seen so sad a face. Her pretty blue eyes looked sunken and faded, her fair hair had taken a tinge of grey.

"Mrs. Koffsky," I cried, concerned, "what is it? Is Koffsky——?"

"No," she said in a quiet, dull voice, "Koffsky is not dead—yet, but I think he is dying. I am in mourning for my children," she added, glancing down at her dress. "You remember poor little Stanislas and my pretty Mary? they died three months ago. Ah, Mr. Blencowe," she cried, clasping her hands together, "if you had been at home I should not be a broken-hearted woman now! You have always been a good friend to poor Beethoven, and you would have helped us, I am sure."

"I would indeed," I said, "but how——?"

"Sit down," answered Mrs. Koffsky, "and I will tell you; it will do me good to speak—I have so few friends."

She shaded her eyes with her hand, and went on rapidly:

"We have always been very poor, you know, Mr. Blencowe; well, just when you left England we were poorer than ever. Beethoven had been entirely wrapped up in his opera, and had done nothing to make money—I could only earn a few shillings by needlework—we were nearly starving, and from cold and want of food the children fell sick. My husband was in despair; he went everywhere with his poor opera—but no one would have anything to say to it. We got poorer and poorer, and the doctor said that only proper nursing and nourishment could save our children. I went to your rooms, but you were away and had left no address—we had no other friends to go to. Oh, Mr. Blencowe, it was terrible to see our children dying for want of a little money! And then, just as we were in despair, and there seemed no help anywhere, a gentleman came to see us—a composer whom

Koffsky had met once or twice, and—and he looked at the score of the opera, and made Beethoven play and sing it to him—and then—then he offered to buy it.”

“To buy it!” I cried; “Koffsky’s opera?”

She smiled drearily.

“Yes, he offered to buy the opera, but only on condition that Beethoven should allow him to bring it out, with some alterations, as his own. He offered eighty pounds, and—and Koffsky took the money. He parted with the opera which was to bring him fame and fortune. He signed a paper, I don’t know what it said, and—and the beautiful opera is gone. What else could we do, Mr. Blencowe? We got food and wine for the children—but it was too late. Stanislas and Mary are dead—and Beethoven will never be famous now.”

“Poor Koffsky!” I murmured.

“He did it to save us,” said Mrs. Koffsky softly: “he gave us more than his life. That opera was his very soul, and Beethoven has never been the same since he lost it. He is dying.”

“What is the name of the man who bought the opera?”

“He calls himself Edgardo Campanile,” said Mrs. Koffsky, with a faint smile: “my husband says his real name is Edward Bell.”

I started; I had some acquaintance with Campanile, and, though I know pretty well what meannesses most of my friends are capable of, I should never have credited him with quite such baseness.

When we had talked a little further, Mrs. Koffsky took me into her husband’s room; the poor fellow had expressed a desire to see me. Koffsky was stretched upon his bed, looking death-like. His skin, which was of a dreadful yellow pallor, was stretched so tightly over the almost fleshless bones, that his face looked more like that of a skeleton than a human being. His eyes shone with unnatural brilliancy from their hollow sockets, and the intense blackness of his long tangled hair made his pallor still more ghastly.

“My poor Koffsky,” I said, “I am sorry to see you like this.”

He reached me a feeble claw-like hand, and his dry lips drew themselves into a ghostly smile.

“Has Mary told you?” he gasped, raising himself with difficulty on his elbow.

“About your opera?—yes.”

“I sold it!” he cried, his eyes flashing wildly, “I sold it, my music, my heart’s blood, my own child—I sold it to a stranger! It is gone. I shall never compose another, and the name of

Beethoven Koffsky will remain unknown and unhonoured. I did it for their sakes—for Mary and the children—and the children died—and I have sold my music, my fame—my life!”

His voice died away in a moan. Presently, he plucked my sleeve and drew me nearer to him.

“It is to be performed next week,” he whispered, “at Drury Lane. Oh yes, fine singers will sing in my opera, fine people will hear it—but I—I shall not hear it. Campanile would not tell me about it, but I have looked and asked, and found out everything for myself. He has changed the name and found a new libretto—he has altered some of my music”—here a spasm of anguish passed over the musician’s face—“he has mutilated my *chef-d’œuvre*—but it is still Koffsky’s music. Next week the world will ring with the fame of the great composer—but my name will remain unknown.”

“It is shameful!” I cried hotly.

“Yes, it is shameful—but what could I do? It has killed me. The doctor thinks I can’t last beyond this week, but I shall live till my opera is performed.”

“And yet is it not something that your music should be heard?” I asked after a long pause.

He smiled.

“Yes, you are right—it is something. My child is not born in vain; my child will live and conquer the world: what does it matter if the father is unknown? But it is hard on the father, is it not? and when he loses his child what has he to live for?”

He gazed dreamily before him, and began murmuring to himself the song he had sung to me six months ago: Kosciusko’s love-song. I saw he had become oblivious of my presence, and left the room softly.

I found by looking at the *Standard* that poor Koffsky’s opera, *Kosciusko*, was to be produced the following Thursday, under the title of *Arnold von Winkelried*.

“Great interest is felt throughout musical circles,” said the *Standard*, “in the approaching production of a new opera by the well-known composer, Edgardo Campanile. *Arnold von Winkelried* is founded on a supposed love episode in the life of the celebrated Swiss patriot, and deals with the ultimate death of the hero. We hear that the opera will be quite a new departure from the composer’s usual light and somewhat trifling style, and in place of his light sparkling music we are to expect weird harmonies and wailing chords. The voice of rumour whispers that *Arnold von Winkelried* is the outcome of a bet, Mr. Cyrus P. Tewanger, the renowned American musical dilettante, having



laid a wager to the effect that Signor Campanile is incapable of writing anything in the serious style of opera that will prove a success and add to his reputation. If *Arnold von Winkelried* finds favour with a London audience, Signor Campanile will be the richer by one thousand pounds."

I went at once to Drury Lane and took a stall for Thursday night, determined to hear my poor friend's opera. Thursday came, and found me punctually in my place. It was a full house; pretty women, diamonds and fine dresses were as plentiful as they always are in an English opera-house. I saw the faces of many well-known musical critics in the stalls around me, and wondered if that rogue, Campanile, would win his bet. I almost found it in my heart to wish that Koffsky's opera might prove a failure. I will not describe the music; all I can say is that it pleased me from the first note to the last, that it was full of melody without being commonplace, and in parts rose to a height of passion and pathos that roused the audience to frequent bursts of enthusiasm.

"Good, very good," I heard G—— the critic, who sat beside me, whisper to his companion, "but quite unlike Campanile's usual style and incomparably superior. Wonder how he came to write such an opera."

The curtain went down on the last act, the music dying away in a faint tremulous repetition of the motif of the hero's love song in the second act. There was a roar of applause from the whole house; the opera's success was complete. I looked at my watch; it was three minutes to eleven, and I hurriedly dived for my hat and coat. I had just got them on, when a shout for the composer was raised from the gallery and taken up by the entire audience. Curious to see whether Campanile would have the audacity to respond to this call, I waited. There was a momentary pause, during which the shout of "Composer! composer!" became louder than ever, and then the heavy curtain was rolled back, and a figure came slowly forward. Good heavens! it was Koffsky! Koffsky whom I had left last week more dead than alive. What pluck the man must possess to have dragged himself here! As Koffsky advanced slowly across the stage a sudden and intense silence fell upon the house. A door must suddenly have been opened near me, for I felt a cold wind sweep across my face and a curious chilly sensation creep through the roots of my hair.

"Who the deuce is that fellow?" murmured the critic beside me, and it seemed to me that he was very pale. At the same moment I became aware that I felt extremely ill-at-ease, not to say frightened, but why and wherefore I could not imagine.

Koffsky paused in the centre of the stage and bowed solemnly.

I shall never forget his face. He was very pale, paler and more deathly than ever, and his thin face wore an expression of intense and triumphant joy such as I have never seen in any human countenance. He walked slowly across the stage and disappeared behind the wings. I drew a deep breath; the curious chilly feeling that oppressed me, vanished, and I felt the blood returning to my cheeks. At the same moment the applause broke out again, mingled with hisses from Campanile's friends, who naturally resented this mis-appropriation of the honours of the evening. While Koffsky stood before the curtain I had felt rooted to the spot, but now an intense curiosity seized me as to how the man had got there, and what had happened to him at the hands of the presumably furious Campanile. But how was it that Campanile had allowed him to appear at all? Absorbed in these queries I hurried to the green-room. I found Campanile surrounded by friends and musicians, all plying him with eager questions which he appeared incapable of answering. He was huddled in a chair; he looked panic-stricken, and was mopping his forehead with a large pink handkerchief. When he saw me he started up and caught hold of my arm with a visibly trembling hand.

"Blencowe," he said, "they tell me you know that scoundrelly Pole—what was he doing here? Why the devil did the fellow behave like that? Does he drink? Is he mad?"

"Why did you let him go on?" I asked.

"I tell you I couldn't help it!" stammered Campanile; "I—I was just going on myself, of course, when—when suddenly there was Koffsky, standing right in front of me. I swear he wasn't there before—I swear I never saw him pass, but there he was. Of course I tried to stop the fellow, but—but I couldn't move! I felt as cold as ice—I feel so still. I'll tell you what, there's something wrong somewhere—there's something devilish curious!" He shivered as he spoke, whether from conscience or a chill I cannot undertake to say. But certainly the scoundrel had all the appearance of a man who has had a severe shock.

"Where is Koffsky now?" I asked.

"I don't know," shuddered Campanile, collapsing into his chair again in a heap. "I haven't seen him since—since *then*: I hope to God I shall never see him again!" he added under his breath. Just then a servant came up with some bottles and glasses, and I saw him swallow down half a tumbler of brandy as though it had been water. By this time I was beginning to feel scared myself. An undefined, curious feeling of terror weighed upon me, and without losing any more time I left the green-room and hurried out into the street.

Koffsky must have gone straight home, so I took a hansom and drove off to his lodgings. To my surprise the door was ajar; I pushed it open and went in. The house was very silent, there was no light on the stairs. Had they all gone to bed? But I was determined to solve the mystery of Koffsky's appearance at the opera, and striking a match I stumbled upstairs and entered the little sitting-room. It was empty, save for the two children. I paused a moment, uncertain what to do, then, seeing a light under Koffsky's door, I knocked gently.

"Hush!" said Mrs. Koffsky's low voice from within: "hush! I will come out to you."

I waited for nearly half-an-hour, then the door opened softly and she came out, a lighted candle in her hand. The flickering light showed me a terribly white, tear-stained face.

"Forgive me for disturbing you at such an hour," I began, "but I am anxious about your husband. Has he come home yet?"

"He has *gone* home," she answered, with a curious emphasis on the word.

"Gone home—where? to Poland? that can't be! I saw him less than an hour ago."

"That is impossible," she said quietly; "my husband is dead."

"Dead!" I gasped; "but, Mrs. Koffsky, I saw him!"

For all answer she led me into her room. The sheet was drawn up over the bed, but under it I could see the outline of a still figure. She drew down the sheet. Yes, there was Koffsky's dead white face, fixed in that same look of triumphant joy it had worn on the boards of Drury Lane. "He is happy now," said his wife softly.

I felt cold with horror. I realised now what was the meaning of the chill intangible terror that had haunted me.

"At what hour did he die?" I asked in a voice that sounded quite unlike my own.

"At eleven," she answered. I felt myself turning paler; it was at eleven that Koffsky had appeared before the curtain at Drury Lane.

"Good God!" I cried, "I have seen your husband's spirit!"

She took me into the sitting-room and I told her what I had seen, in a whisper, to avoid rousing the children. There is something ghastly in a whisper, and when I had ended my story I felt more terrified than ever. Mrs. Koffsky looked at me with an awestruck face.

"It is marvellous," she murmured, "but you don't know yet how marvellous. Beethoven knew that his opera was to be given

to-night, and all day he has seemed waiting—waiting. He has been terribly ill ; a dozen times I thought he was dying—dead—but he rallied ; it seemed as though he *would* not die. Suddenly, this evening, as the clock struck half-past eight he started, moved, and half raised himself in his bed.

“ ‘Hark!’ he cried, ‘hark! don’t you hear? it has begun! my music! I hear it!’ ”

“He fell back on his pillows, but I could see that he was listening, and sometimes he smiled and beat time feebly with his hand and hummed a few bars of a song. An hour or two went on like this ; I thought it must be time to give him his medicine, and looked at the clock. It wanted three minutes to eleven. At that moment Beethoven started upright in bed ; his eyes were widely opened and fixed as though they saw, oh, so far away !

“ ‘Listen!’ he cried, ‘don’t you hear? Oh you *must* hear! applause! shouts! they are calling me! Mary, they are calling me!’ He remained for a moment, gazing eagerly before him with a strange look of joy upon his face, then fell back. He was quite dead, and as I raised his head upon my arm the clock struck the first stroke of eleven.”

Mrs. Koffsky was silent. I drew a deep breath and a little chilly wind stirred my hair.

Poor Koffsky! His dying ears had heard the distant echoes of his beloved music ; the applause he had so longed for in life had had power to draw his spirit to the spot. Beethoven Koffsky had been happier in his death than in his life.

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## Hurst of Hurstcote.

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WE were at Eton together, and afterwards at Christchurch, and I always got on very well with him; but somehow he was a man about whom none of the other men cared very much. There was always something strange and secret about him; even at Eton he liked grubbing among books and trying chemical experiments, better than cricket or the boats. That sort of thing would make any boy unpopular. At Oxford, it wasn't merely his studious ways and his love of science that went against him; it was a certain way he had of gazing at us through narrowing lids, as though he were looking at us more from the outside than any human being has a right to look at another, and a bored air of belonging to another and a higher race, whenever we talked the ordinary chatter about athletics and the Schools.

A certain paper on "Black Magic," which he read to the Essay Society, filled to overflowing the cup of his College's contempt for him. I suppose no man was ever so much disliked for so little cause.

When we went down I noticed—for I knew his people at home—that the sentiment of dislike which he excited in most men was curiously in contrast to the emotions which he inspired in women. They all liked him, listened to him with rapt attention, talked of him with undisguised enthusiasm. I watched their strange infatuation with calmness for several years, but the day came when he met Kate Danvers, and then I was not calm any more. She behaved like all the rest of the women, and to her, quite suddenly, Hurst threw the handkerchief. He was not Hurst of Hurstcote then, but his family was good, and his means not despicable, so he and she were conditionally engaged. People said it was a poor match for the beauty of the county; and her people, I know, hoped she would think better of it. As for me—well, this is not the story of my life, but of his. I need only say that I thought him a lucky man.

I went to town to complete the studies that were to make me M.D.; Hurst went abroad, to Paris or Leipzig or somewhere,



to study hypnotism, and to prepare notes for his book on "Black Magic." This came out in the autumn, and had a strange and brilliant success. Hurst became famous, famous as men do become nowadays. His writings were asked for by all the big periodicals. His future seemed assured. In the spring they were married; I was not present at the wedding. The practice my father had bought for me in London claimed all my time.

It was more than a year after their marriage that I had a letter from Hurst.

"Congratulate me, old man! Crowds of uncles and cousins have died, and I am Hurst of Hurstcote, which God wot I never thought to be. The place is all to pieces, but we can't live anywhere else. If you can get away about September, come down and see us. We shall be installed. I have everything now that I ever longed for—Hurstcote—cradle of our race—and all that, the only woman in the world for my wife, and—but that's enough for any man, surely.—JOHN HURST OF HURSTCOTE."

Of course I knew Hurstcote. Who doesn't? Hurstcote, which seventy years ago was one of the most perfect, as well as the finest, brick Tudor mansions in England. The Hurst who lived there seventy years ago noticed one day that his chimneys smoked, and called in a Hastings architect. "Your chimneys," said the local man, "are beyond me, but with the timbers and lead of your castle I can build you a snug little house in the corner of your Park, much more suitable for a residence than this old brick building." So they gutted Hurstcote, and built the new house, and faced it with stucco. All of which things you will find written in the Guide to Sussex. Hurstcote, when I had seen it, had been the merest shell. How would Hurst make it habitable? Even if he had inherited much money with the castle, and intended to restore the building, that would be a work of years, not months. What would he do?

In September I went to see.

Hurst met me at Pevensey Station.

"Let's walk up," he said; "there's a cart to bring your traps. Eh! but it's good to see you again, Bernard."

It was good to see him again. And to see him so changed. And so changed for good too. He was much stouter, and no longer wore the untidy ill-fitting clothes of the old days. He was rather smartly got up in grey stockings and knee-breeches, and wore a velvet shooting-jacket. But the most noteworthy change was in his face; it bore no more the eager, inquiring, half-scornful, half-tolerant look that had won him such ill-will at Oxford. His face now was the face of a man completely at peace with himself and with the world.

"How well you look!" I said, as we walked along the level winding road through the still marshes.

"How much better you mean!" he laughed. "I know it. Bernard, you'll hardly believe it, but I am on the way to be a popular man!"

He had not lost his old knack of reading one's thoughts.

"Don't trouble yourself to find the polite answer to that," he hastened to add. "No one knows as well as I how unpopular I was—and no one knows so well why," he added in a very low voice. "However," he went on gaily, "unpopularity is a thing of the past. The folk hereabout call on us, and condole with us on our hutch. A thing of the past, as I said—but what a past it was, eh! You're the only man who ever liked me. You don't know what that's been to me many a dark day and night. When the others were—you know—it was like a hand holding mine, to think of you. I've always thought I was sure of one soul in the world to stand by me."

"Yes," I said—"Yes."

He flung his arm over my shoulder with a frank, boyish gesture of affection quite foreign to his nature as I had known it.

"And I know why you didn't come to our wedding," he went on—"but that's all right now, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said again, for indeed it was. There are brown eyes in the world, after all, as well as blue, and one pair of brown that meant Heaven to me as the blue had never done.

"That's well," Hurst answered, and we walked on in satisfied silence, till we passed across the furze-crowned ridge, and went down the hill to Hurstcote. It lies in the hollow, ringed round by its moat, its dark red walls showing the sky behind them; no welcoming sparkle of early litten candle, only the pale amber of the September evening shining through the gaunt unglazed windows.

Three planks and a rough handrail had replaced the old draw-bridge. We passed across the moat, and Hurst pulled a knotted rope that hung beside the great iron-bound door. A bell clanged loudly inside. In the moment we spent there, waiting, Hurst pushed back a brier that was trailing across the arch, and let it fall outside the handrail.

"Nature is too much with us here," he said, laughing. "The clematis spends its time tripping one up or clawing at one's hair, and we are always expecting the ivy to force itself through the window and make an uninvited third at our dinner-table."

Then the great door of Hurstcote Castle swung back, and there

stood Kate, a thousand times sweeter and more beautiful than ever. I looked at her with momentary terror and dazzlement. She was a thousand times more beautiful than any woman with brown eyes could be. My heart almost stopped beating. "With life or death in the balance: Right!" To be beautiful is not the same thing as to be dear, thank God. I went forward and took her hand with a free heart.

It was a pleasant fortnight I spent with them. They had had one tower completely repaired, and in its queer eight-sided rooms we lived, when we were not out among the marshes or by the blue sea at Pevensey.

Mrs. Hurst had made the rooms quaintly charming by a medley of Liberty stuffs and Wardour Street furniture. The grassy space within the castle walls, with its underground passages, its crumbling heaps of masonry overgrown with lush creepers, was better than any garden. There we met the fresh morning; there we lounged through lazy noons. There the grey evenings found us.

I have never seen any two married people so utterly, so undisguisedly in love as these were. I, the third, had no embarrassment in so being—for their love had in it a completeness, a childish abandonment, to which the presence of a third—a friend—was no burden. A happiness, reflected from theirs, shone on me. The days went by, dreamlike, and brought the eve of my return to London and the commonplaces of life.

We were sitting in the courtyard; Hurst had gone to the village to post some letters. A big moon was just showing over the battlements, when Mrs. Hurst shivered.

"It's late," she said, "and cold; the summer is gone. Let us go in." So we went in to the little warm room, where a wood fire flickered on a brick hearth, and a shaded lamp was already glowing softly. Here we sat on the cushioned seat in the open window, and looked out through the lozenge panes at the gold moon and the light of her making ghosts in the white mist that rose thick and heavy from the moat.

"I am so sorry you are going," she said, presently; "but you will come and skate on the moat with us at Christmas, won't you? We mean to have a mediæval Christmas. You don't know what that is? Neither do I: but John does. He is very, very wise."

"Yes," I answered, "he used to know many things that most men don't even dream of as possible to know."

She was silent a minute, and then shivered again. I picked up the shawl she had thrown down when we came in, and put it round her.

"Thank you! I think—don't you—that there are some things one is not meant to know, and some things one is meant *not* to know. You see the distinction?"

"I suppose so—yes."

"Did it never frighten you, in the old days," she went on, "to see that John would never—was always——"

"But he has given all that up now?"

"Oh yes, ever since our honeymoon. Do you know he used to mesmerise me. It was horrible. And that book of his——"

"I didn't know you believed in Black Magic."

"Oh, I don't—not the least bit. I never was at all superstitious, you know. But those things always frighten me just as much as if I believed in them. And besides—I think they're wicked; but John—— Ah, there he is! Let's go and meet him."

His dark figure was outlined against the sky behind the hill. She wrapped the soft shawl more closely around her, and we went out in the moonlight to meet her husband.

The next morning when I entered the room I found that it lacked its chief ornament. The sparkling white and silver breakfast accessories were there, but for the deft white hands and kindly welcoming blue eyes of my hostess I looked in vain. At ten minutes past nine Hurst came in looking horribly worried, and more like his old self than I had ever expected to see him.

"I say, old man," he said, hurriedly, "are you really set on going back to town to-day? Because Kate's awfully queer—I can't think what's wrong. I want you to see her after breakfast."

I reflected a minute. "I can stay if I send a wire," I said.

"I wish you would then," Hurst said, wringing my hand and turning away; "she's been off her head most of the night, talking the most astounding nonsense. You must see her after breakfast. Will you pour out the coffee?"

"I'll see her now, if you like," I said, and he led me up the winding stair to the room at the top of the tower.

I found her quite sensible, but very feverish. I wrote a prescription, and rode Hurst's mare over to Eastbourne to get it made up. When I got back she was worse. It seemed to be a sort of aggravated marsh-fever. I reproached myself with having let her sit by the open window the night before. But I remembered with some satisfaction that I had told Hurst that the place was not quite healthy. I only wished I had insisted on it more strongly.

For the first day or two I thought it was merely a touch of marsh-fever, that would pass off with no worse consequence than a



little weakness; but on the third day I perceived that she would die.

Hurst met me as I came from her bedside, stood aside on the narrow landing for me to pass, and followed me down into the little sitting-room, which, deprived for three days of her presence, already bore the air of a room long deserted. He came in after me and shut the door.

"You're wrong," he said abruptly, reading my thoughts as usual; "she won't die—she can't die."

"She will," I bluntly answered, for I am no believer in that worst refinement of torture known as 'breaking bad news gently.' "Send for any other man you choose. I'll consult with the whole College of Physicians if you like. But nothing short of a miracle can save her."

"And you don't believe in miracles," he answered quietly. "I do, you see."

"My dear old fellow, don't buoy yourself up with false hopes. I know my trade; I wish I could believe I didn't! Go back to her now; you have not very long to be together."

I wrung his hand; he returned the pressure, but said almost cheerfully—

"You know your trade, old man, but there are some things you don't know. Mine, for instance—I mean my wife's constitution. Now I know that thoroughly. And you mark my words—she won't die. You might as well say *I* was not long for this world."

"*You*," I said with a touch of annoyance; "you're good for another thirty or forty years."

"Exactly so," he rejoined quickly, "and so is she. Her life's as good as mine; you'll see, she won't die."

At dusk on the next day she died. He was with her; he had not left her since he had told me that she would not die. He was sitting by her holding her hand. She had been unconscious for some time, when suddenly she dragged her hand from his, raised herself in bed, and cried out in a tone of acutest anguish—

"John! John! Let me go! For God's sake let me go!"

Then she fell back dead.

He would not understand—would not believe; he still sat by her, holding her hand, and calling on her by every name that love could teach him. I began to fear for his brain. He would not leave her, so by-and-by I brought him a cup of coffee in which I had mixed a strong opiate. In about an hour I went back and found him fast asleep with his face on the pillow close by the face of his dead wife. The gardener and I carried him down to my



bedroom, and I sent for a woman from the village. He slept for twelve hours. When he awoke his first words were—

“She is not dead! I must go to her!”

I hoped that the sight of her, pale, and beautiful, and cold, with the white asters about her, and her white hands crossed on her breast, would convince him; but no. He looked at her and said—

“Bernard, you’re no fool; you know as well as I do that this is not death. Why treat it so? It is some form of catalepsy. If she should awake and find herself like this the shock might destroy her reason.”

And, to the horror of the woman from the village, he flung the asters on to the floor, covered the body with blankets, and sent for hot water bottles.

I was now quite convinced that his brain was affected, and I saw plainly enough that he would never consent to take the necessary steps for the funeral.

I began to wonder whether I had not better send for another doctor, for I felt that I did not care to try the opiate again on my own responsibility, and something must be done about the funeral.

I spent a day in considering the matter—a day spent by John Hurst beside his wife’s body. Then I made up my mind to try all my powers to bring him to reason, and to this end I went once more into the chamber of death. I found Hurst talking wildly, in low whispers. He seemed to be talking to someone who was not there. He did not know me, and suffered himself to be led away. He was, in fact, in the first stage of brain fever. I actually blessed his illness, because it opened a way out of the dilemma in which I found myself. I wired for a trained nurse from town, and for the local undertaker. In a week she was buried, and John Hurst still lay unconscious and unheeding; but I did not look forward to his first renewal of consciousness.

Yet his first conscious words were not the inquiry I dreaded. He only asked whether he’d been ill long, and what had been the matter. When I had told him he just nodded and went off to sleep again.

A few evenings later I found him excited and feverish, but quite himself, mentally. I said as much to him in answer to a question which he put to me—

“There’s no brain disturbance now? I’m not mad or anything?”

“No, no, my dear fellow. Everything as it should be.”

“Then,” he answered slowly, “I must get up and go to her.”

My worst fears were realised.

In moments of intense mental strain the truth sometimes overpowers all one's better resolves. It sounds brutal, horrible. I don't know what I meant to say; what I said was—

"You can't; she's buried."

He sprang up in bed, and I caught him by the shoulders.

"Then it's true!" he cried, "and I'm not mad. Oh, great God in heaven, let me go to her, let me go! It's true! It's true!"

I held him fast, and spoke.

"I am strong—you know that. You are weak and ill; you are quite in my power—we're old friends, and there's nothing I wouldn't do to serve you. Tell me what you mean; I will do anything you wish." This I said to soothe him.

"Let me go to her," he said again.

"Tell me all about it," I repeated. "You are too ill to go to her. I will go, if you can collect yourself and tell me why. You could not walk five yards."

He looked at me doubtfully.

"You'll help me? You won't say I'm mad, and have me shut up? You'll help me?"

"Yes, yes—I swear it!" All the time I was wondering what I should do to keep him from his mad purpose.

He lay back on his pillows, white and ghastly; his thin features and sunken eyes showed hawklike above the rough growth of his four weeks' beard. I took his hand. His pulse was rapid, and his lean fingers clenched themselves round mine.

"Look here," he said, "I don't know—— There aren't any words to tell you how true it is. I am not mad, I am not wandering. I am as sane as you are. Now listen, and if you've a human heart in you, you'll help me. When I married her I gave up hypnotism and all the old studies; she hated the whole business. But before I gave it up I hypnotised her, and when she was completely under my control I forbade her soul to leave its body till my time came to die."

I breathed more freely. Now I understood why he had said "*She cannot die.*"

"My dear old man," I said gently, "dismiss these fancies, and face your grief boldly. You can't control the great facts of life and death by hypnotism. She is dead; she is dead, and her body lies in its place. But her soul is with God who gave it."

"No!" he cried, with such strength as the fever had left him. "No! no! Ever since I have been ill I have seen her, every day, every night, and always wringing her hands and moaning, 'Let me go, John—let me go.'"

"Those were her last words, indeed," I said; "it is natural

that they should haunt you. See, you bade her soul not leave her body. It has left it, for she is dead."

His answer came almost in a whisper, borne on the wings of a long breathless pause.

*"She is dead, but her soul has not left her body."*

I held his hand more closely, still debating what I should do.

"She comes to me," he went on; "she comes to me continually. She does not reproach, but she implores, 'Let me go, John, let me go!' And I have no more power now; I cannot let her go, I cannot reach her; I can do nothing, nothing. Ah!" he cried, with a sudden sharp change of voice that thrilled through me to the ends of my fingers and feet: "Ah, Kate, my life, I will come to you! No, no, you shan't be left alone among the dead. I am coming, my sweet."

He reached his arms out towards the door with a look of longing and love, so really, so patently addressed to a sentient presence, that I turned sharply to see if, in truth, perhaps—Nothing—of course—nothing.

"She is dead," I repeated stupidly. "I was obliged to bury her."

A shudder ran through him.

"I must go and see for myself," he said.

Then I knew—all in a minute—what to do.

"I will go," I said; "I will open her coffin, and if she is not—is not as other dead folk, I will bring her body back to this house."

"Will you go now?" he asked, with set lips.

It was nigh on midnight. I looked into his eyes.

"Yes, now," I said, "but you must swear to lie still till I return."

"I swear it." I saw I could trust him, and I went to wake the nurse. He called weakly after me, "There's a lanthorn in the tool-shed, and Bernard——"

"Yes, my poor old chap."

"There's a screwdriver in the sideboard drawer."

I think until he said that I really meant to go. I am not accustomed to lie, even to mad people, and I think I meant it till then.

He leaned on his elbow, and looked at me with wide eyes.

"Think," he said, "what she must feel. Out of the body, and yet tied to it, all alone among the dead. Oh, make haste, make haste, for if I am not mad, and I have really fettered her soul, there is but one way!"

"And that is?"

"I must die too. Her soul can leave her body when I die."

I called the nurse, and left him. I went out, and across the wold to the church, but I did not go in. I carried the screwdriver and the lanthorn, lest he should send the nurse to see if I had taken them. I leaned on the churchyard wall, and thought of her. I had loved the woman, and I remembered it in that hour.

As soon as I dared I went back to him—remember I believed him mad—and told the lie that I thought would give him most ease.

"Well?" he said, eagerly, as I entered.

I signed to the nurse to leave us.

"There is no hope," I said. "You will not see your wife again till you meet her in heaven."

I laid down the screwdriver and the lanthorn, and sat down by him.

"You have seen her?"

"Yes."

"And there's no doubt?"

"No doubt."

"Then I *am* mad; but you're a good fellow, Bernard, and I'll never forget it in this world or the next."

He seemed calmer, and fell asleep with my hand in his. His last word was a "Thank you," that cut me like a knife.

When I went into his room next morning he was gone. But on his pillow a letter lay, painfully scrawled in pencil, and addressed to me.

"You lied. Perhaps you meant kindly. You didn't understand. She is not dead. She has been with me again. Though her soul may not leave her body, thank God it can still speak to mine. That vault—it is worse than a mere grave. Good-bye."

I ran all the way to the church, and entered by the open door. The air was chill and dank after the crisp October sunlight. The stone that closed the vault of the Hursts of Hurstcote had been raised, and was lying beside the dark gaping hole in the chancel floor. The nurse, who had followed me, came in before I could shake off the horror that held me moveless. We both went down into the vault. Weak, exhausted by illness and sorrow, John Hurst had yet found strength to follow his love to the grave. I tell you he had crossed that wold alone, in the grey of the chill dawn; alone he had raised the stone and gone down to her. He had opened her coffin, and he lay on the floor of the vault with his wife's body in his arms.

He had been dead some hours.

\* \* \* \* \*

The brown eyes filled with tears when I told my wife this story.

"You were quite right, he was mad," she said. "Poor things, poor lovers!"

But sometimes when I wake in the grey morning, and between waking and sleeping, I think of all those things that I must shut out from my sleeping and my waking thoughts, I wonder was I right, or was he? Was he mad, or was I idiotically incredulous? For—and it is this thing that haunts me—when I found them dead together in the vault, she had been buried five weeks. But the body that lay in John Hurst's arms, among the mouldering coffins of the Hursts of Hurstcote, was perfect and beautiful as when first he clasped her in his arms, a bride.

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## A Ghost of the Sea.

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ONE touches the spiritual in letters with uncertain fingers. Destiny is involved enough for most of us without invoking the super-known; and these breathless visitors leave a trail across human incident which spoils it for almost any purpose of comparison. Yet a ghost interests. Interests the common man, because he is a creature who doubts, and who would like to illumine the dim possibilities of death and judgment by a single proved apparition. He is bored by Moses and the prophets, but he craves something with wings. We may leave him to his illusions. Spook-aided conduct is barren in the end as all extrinsic morality, and this story is written neither to convince nor to startle. It is told by a student in human ailment for any equally interested, without comment on the possible reality of its terrible vision. Though no believer in spirits, I confess myself unable to explain what I relate on any theory, known to me, of alienation or telepathy which could over-ride such an accumulation of coincidence, and the reader must remember this confession as he proceeds.

The scene lay in northern Cornwall. It was not contingent to the story, but it made an effective setting. The events recorded here might have happened at any sea-board town as well as in that desolate valley of the West, which split the parapets of the red cliffs with a shifting wedge of sand. The dull roar of its waves hung always in the air, through which the shrill screaming of sea-birds stretched like sharp threads of colour. A thin brown stream wandered in the sand, as a traveller with tired feet. But every month, when the moon filled and the tide thrust its white face past the head, that film of grey river rose and bulged a belly of silver from shore to shore; leaving a fringe of sea-froth along the marshes, and tossing its sea treasures up against the hillocks of blown sand, tagged with sharp grasses, which hid the hollow of thecombe.

A square white cottage on the south side, under the cliffs, seemed rather to enforce the desolate remoteness of the place, as though in that terrible quarantine only such men could live as

were a peril to their kind. North and south, unbroken for miles, stood the sheer front of perilous cliffs, rent and twisted and scarred with fire, a veritable rampart of death; and even across this narrow haven was driven, for most hours of the tide, a seething fence of broken foam.

Landward were the lonely moors of Lyonesse, swept by the wind's drag-net all the winter, savage and dark and bare; beneath them once the wrecker had made his den, and flashed false lights across the sea; and still, though he had gone, and only the merlin dropped now upon his prey from his floating anchorage in the air, death stayed between that oily current and the splintered fangs of stone—stayed and feasted.

I had been walking since morning, by the sheep-track along the cliff, half a midsummer day, and was dry even in spirit. Otherwise, probably, I should have passed by very much on the other side of that dreary staring sea-lodge, whose white walls wavered in the glare of heated sand. Instead, I ploughed ankle deep through the hot light dust, and noticed, as I neared the cliff, the figure of a man stretched lazily beneath it, whom I recognised, on closer inspection, as an old acquaintance, a man of the most social mind, who seemed completely inappropriate to such a place. He rose at my hail, and accepting the claim with a sweep of his hat, came towards me.

At closer quarters I seemed to lose the man I had known; the gait, lounge, and stoop were the same, but the face and hands were become like the veins of a withered leaf, and turned to the transparent brownness of a woodland stream.

It was almost horrible. I asked what he was doing there.

He eyed me guardedly, as if measuring my perception.

"Doing," he said, "nothing. What are you?"

"Walking; Cornwall, Devon, and a bit of Dorset; a coasting trip."

"And you've put in here for water?"

"For liquid of some sort; what have you?"

"Milk, whisky——"

"Good?"

"Smugglers! been robbing the Queen's revenue and defrauding thirsty throats for the last forty years. I unearthed it from an old safe my host had boarded up, warm as first love and mild as new milk; and, he being an honest soul and wearing a blue ribbon, I have had to lap it up myself."

As we walked towards the cottage he told me something of the place; of the man and woman with whom he lodged, who were sea-thieves become Methodist and agricultural; of that deadly

coast, and the waste uplands about it; with weird tales and fears which gave a bleaker colour to the moorland light and almost to its people; but he told me nothing about himself. Yet of all wrecks, derelict on that shore, his was the strangest.

Six months earlier Dick Melton's face was among the well-known of London. He was an authority in equity cases, the best teller of a dangerous story in Mayfair, and could sing a vulgar song urbanely. His future and his fortune were assured, and he was about to marry. Then, suddenly, he disappeared. It was given out that something—that ominous “something”—had happened, and that silence would be the kindest tribute to his memory.

We had met more than occasionally, and I had liked him. There was something distinctively straight and sane in his thought and his talk. He admitted the divine right of no subject to silence, but of almost all things, not base or foul, to some sort of respect. We had talked everything over with open hands, from the foundations of faith to the latest scandal, and were still good friends, without finding, I believe, a single point of complete agreement.

I had met Dick Melton last on the evening after he had won a long and intricate case and was in a vortex of congratulation. He was usually fond of praise, and of receiving it graciously, but that night he turned his back to it with an unmistakable “vanity of vanities” in a dulled eye. I noticed it then, I remembered it now, and wanted the reason. Doubtless the cause of that and of his exile were the same.

Yet I could make no guess. Moral delinquencies are not lived down by men of energy and talent in out-of-the-way places, and defaulting of a grosser sort leaves no uncertain track. Opium occurred to me, but a second glance at Melton's eyes dispelled that suggestion, and I knew of no other vice, too disreputable for our standards, which could lead a man into the wilderness or leave him there so completely his own master.

We did justice to the smuggler's whisky, and sat down under the cliff for a pipe, but Melton would not smoke, and, remembering what an epicure in tobacco he had once been, I asked why.

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Well,” he said vaguely, “I've dropped it.”

“Didn't suit you?”

“No,” he answered, “it didn't suit me here.”

*Here* evidently made the difference. What was it? sea air, or piety, or failing health?

He did not say; he seemed disinclined for speech, especially

about himself; but while I spoke of London he warmed somewhat, as a Londoner will, and when I rose to go——

“Look here,” he said, “you can’t get to Stanna before midnight, if that is where you would stop; rest the night here, if you will risk our fare; my heart is dry for a little talk.”

So I stayed, and, till the folk with whom he lodged came home from their work and spread supper, I told him all he cared to hear of the world he had forsaken. His interest was pathetic; sometimes keen and strained, then dropping back to a flat dead smile, as though he had suddenly pressed his face against some barrier he had forgot. He had been a politician with a grasp of foreign intrigue unusual in an Englishman, but now it was only of his friends that he asked news: he could neglect the fate of empires.

After supper I suggested a stroll by the sea, but Melton seeming nervously disinclined to leave the cottage, we sat under its great chimney through which the twilight stars could be seen before they shone in the open sky. He supposed I should be tired, and left me early; but I was surprised later, hearing the front door slam, to see him walking swiftly down towards the water. I lay for some hours awake, but he did not return.

## II.

The next morning, after breakfast, when I had lighted my pipe before starting, Melton asked abruptly:

“Can you tell me anything of Miss Exmoor?”

I may have looked my surprise, for he added:

“I was to have married her; perhaps you know that? It was broken off and I came here. I was to blame; I did it; did it badly too. But she never wrote me a word: girls don’t, perhaps; it’s less to them.”

“No, no,” I said, “it’s more to them. That’s why! They can’t.”

“A very curious *why*,” he sighed. “Can you tell me anything?”

There was a great deal I could not; he may have seen it in my face. I dropped him a few bare facts, thinking even they should have been disguised.

“She is still unmarried,” I concluded.

“Yes, I supposed that.” He hesitated a moment. “Will you tell me what is said of her?”

“Good or bad?”



"Anything. She flirts?"

"So they say."

"Yes, so they said; what woman does not who can? Is that all?"

"That is all, I believe, but it may be a good deal."

"It was, you mean?"

"So I understood."

He looked hard into my eyes as if to strain the sentence from any malice they might have added.

"Are you in a hurry?" he went on presently; "if not, and it would not bore you, I should like to tell you why I am here. Yesterday I thought myself indifferent. I have thought so for six months, and really it amounts to very little what view the world takes of me in the end. Perhaps your presence has weakened me, for to-day I wish, when it is all over, to be understood. It is a bad business at the best, but even the worst—especially the worst—want justice; aye, and interest, kindness, almost love. I think, too, it might help her to be honest if she knew why I was false: oh! I don't mean now, later, when I'm done with. Will you hear me?"

I replied by unslinging my knapsack. I was very willing to hear him.

"If you don't mind the sun," he said, "shall we go across to the dunes? I never warm now, there seems to be ice in my blood, but the sun helps me to speak."

We went across the river and through the yellow drift-sand to the wandering hillocks along the shore, tufted with snake-grass and the blue sea-holly. He spread himself on their steaming whiteness, feeling for the heat like a lizard.

"Curious," he said, as he lay with his open fingers pressed against the sand, "till you came I was content to be missed on any terms; now—I'm not."

"When I left you all I had the choice of saying why I went, and being thought a fool, or of holding my tongue and seeming a knave. I chose that; it's the simpler choice for a lawyer, but it was bitter enough at first. Then I came here and forgot it all, or supposed I had; it's easier to renounce the world than one fancies, but it's harder to renounce oneself. We want to be taken at our own figuring even when dust, in 'marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,' you know; that's the victory for most of us over the grave!"

He paused a moment, the bitterness passed from his face, and he smiled at me sadly.

"It's not all posthumous vanity," he said; "at present, from



my tale, I should be judged merely a common liar; but later on, when I'm past the gain of anyone's pity, what I tell you may be credited, credited to me, and perhaps those who have trusted me may be less ashamed. Will you report it?"

I promised I would do that and more.

"There is no more," he said. Then he drew himself up on to his elbow, and began abruptly:

"I was in Egypt three years ago; you may remember. There was a difficulty about some Canal Bonds, and I represented clients a good deal interested. Well, that doesn't concern us. I stayed in Cairo, at Shepherd's; I met a girl there who was good enough to take a deeper interest in me than I deserved. Her father was something in the Government reconstruction department; something big; and she and her mother were waiting till a house should be ready for them. The story is too long to tell. In the end we vowed the usual eternities, and I repented of them in a week—no! in about three. She was one of those girls who think that everything this side of a certain temptation is virtue, and they include a good deal; a perplexing amount to a man who confounds it with propriety, and who imagines that a woman who begins with a wink will stop nowhere; but she often stops very suddenly." He looked nervously, as he spoke, towards the sea. "I'm speaking for myself: I made that mistake. I behaved badly, but she only liked me the better, because she thought me too staid before, and supposed that *she* had made the difference; and a woman likes to make a difference, even for the worse—if she loves you."

I doubted the point, but did not debate it: there is, perhaps, no moral postulate true for all the sex, or false for some member of it. But I dislike all *ex uno* generalities.

Melton shifted his position to a fresh patch of hot sand, and spread out his arms.

"I had to leave for home rather abruptly," he went on, "and we arranged nothing but to write. I thought she would forget me in a month or two, and hoped it fervently; but she did not. She wrote every week for half a year; then came a break, and whilst I was wondering what had caused it she appeared in London. She had persuaded her mother that she required change; but it was on a change of name that she was thinking, and she had come for it to me.

"It was early in the season; I met her at a crush before I knew she was in town, and she told me she had been living for that moment. I never saw her again. I think she must have heard shortly after that I was engaged to Miss Exmoor, but she never

reproached me even through the post. She spent the summer quietly, I believe, with some country friends, and left in the autumn for Egypt.

"That was May. In September I was at Eastbourne. It was towards the end of the month, the one fine month of last year, if you remember. Miss Exmoor was staying there with some friends, and I joined her for a week after some climbing in the Pyrenees. I was as fit as a man could be, and my time and mind full of two big cases to come on before Christmas. Would you consider me," he said, turning sharply round, "a likely subject for hallucinations or any other sort of nervous mania?"

"No," I replied; "no man less so."

"So I supposed," he said; "you thought me over sane at times. Well, we used to walk every evening after dinner on the parade, and one night I had strolled with Miss Exmoor the length of that brick-paved walk towards the Head. Coming back, I noticed a curious yellow streak of light in the water near the shore. It moved as we moved like a ray of the moon; only it was no ray, but a misty brightness, and there was no moon to make it. I stopped and pointed it out to my companion, or rather, I tried to, for she could see nothing, and rallied me jestingly on after-dinner apparitions.

"I am a trifle short-sighted, you know, and do not see quite clearly in the dusk, so I put up my eye-glass to discover what the thing could be. . . . It was the body of a woman floating within the water near the shore, floating——"

"Do you mean to say," I broke in, "that your glass defined what had seemed a blur of light to the shape of a woman?"

"That is what it did," he said; "the shape appeared to float in the water as a cloud floats in the air, for it was bent somewhat with the movement of the sea; and slid through it swiftly like a fish, but without apparent effort."

"Do you know what this little business of your eye-glass means as an argument?" I asked.

"I know now, of course; then—I knew nothing. I felt a choking coldness round me, like the coils of a snake, that throttled me numb; it seemed as if my blood were running out at my feet. Men jest about fear; they never would if they had felt it. I forget what I said or did at the moment: laughed the thing off somehow, managed anyhow to dupe my companion, and got her indoors. The rest of the evening was like a fevered dream. The rosy lamps, the murmur of women's voices, the flicker of their jewels, the quick notes of music, the long wail of a song, a certain blatant red screen, all seemed blended in a

misty tank of green water, through which the body of that woman went. I endured it to the end, but before the last good-night I was on the beach, hurrying down to the sea. It was there to meet me, rocking indolently to and fro, beautiful, terrible, the graceful figure of a girl, faintly luminous, and the pale colour of its loosened hair. I don't think I doubted for a moment what it was: there was an instant flash of recognition in its eyes, the lips smiled; I had kissed them all too often under the hard Cairene moon not to know them then. I cannot remember now what I said, or how I acted; so much has happened since, and I was in no state to observe. I questioned it, commanded, implored, but no answer came back, though its eyes seemed to show I could be heard.

"The next day I was in town. Morning brought new confidence, and I told myself that this was business for the doctors. I saw Hadley Burroughs—do you know him?"

"Yes."

"He is as good as can be had, isn't he?"

"For the eyes, yes."

"I asked him to look at mine, but I told him nothing of what I had seen. He said they were in perfect order, and fit for anything. I went on from him to Spencer."

"Sir Evan?"

"Yes; he takes that kind of failure, you know. I told him my trouble as far as I cared to, and sat down under his glasses. He found incipient optic neuritis; you know what that is?"

"No, in Evan Spencer's patients I do not. I believe it is something in his ophthalmoscope. Anyhow it is catching, for no one who consults him escapes it."

"I see, something bogus? So it struck me at the time; but he thought it could be cured if I would consent to take sufficient trouble. I explained that the trouble was with me already, and promised absolute obedience. But it came to nothing. He said I must have change, go to the sea, and so forth. To the sea, forsooth! but I went—for one night. I told myself the whole thing was irrational; but I found it easier to say so in town than on the beach, and came back.

"Then I tried to 'devil' the thing myself; bought a dozen books on diseases of the brain, nervous apparitions, partial mania, blunders of the eye, and so forth; all very interesting, but telling me nothing I did not know and everything I did not want, so I shut up the books, and waited for something to happen. But nothing did. I seemed absolutely sound and sane. I even persuaded myself the appearance had been some passing derange-

ment, and went down one afternoon to Brighton to test a new stretch of sea."

"Why?"

"To get clear of association. I thought I had succeeded, for though I stayed all that evening on the front I saw nothing. I went back to my hotel on wings. But the evening after, the thing was there, floating in the water at my feet."

"The next night?" I inquired.

"Yes, the second. I went after that to several other places, and it was always on the second night that it appeared."

"That seems as though the salt air had something to do with it."

"Does it? I told myself a dozen things of the sort, and believed none of them. In fact, I believed nothing. The appearance of the mental image of one's late sweetheart is not, in black and white, so very terrible; only, unhappily, it was not in black and white, not indeed in anything commonly conceivable, nor was it a mental image. I had never seen, nor, indeed, so thought of her; in spite of the inducements of her evening dresses. It was my consolation to believe they were still aiding her flirtations, for I told myself that no woman who flirts could well achieve a spiritual duplicate. And as the practical solution of my trouble was apparently to avoid the sea, I determined to adopt it. But even that failed me.

"I had returned from a 'week end' in the country, and found a letter waiting me from Egypt. It was from a friend there, and mentioned the death of Miss . . . . I can't give you her real name, but the one I used will do—of Miss Charmian, on the last arrived P. and O. It was believed she had fallen overboard. She was accustomed, it seemed, to sit upon the taffrail, in spite of cautions, and was last seen there one evening. No splash had been heard and no cry, though the night was an oil calm, and many passengers were on deck.

"That letter altered all things for me, and ended them; it was my order of dismissal from this company of strolling players, in which I hoped to take the big parts. I made out from it that Miss . . . . Charmian must have been drowned when the boat was a couple of days from Port Said, the night before I had seen at Eastbourne that ghostly body in the sea."

"That was surmise?"

"It was at first, but I confirmed it. She was missed about twenty-five hours before I saw her."

"Her!"

"Yes, that closed the pleadings: I had known it was she all



along, but between 'her' dancing, laughing, flirting as I supposed, and 'her'—dead was all the difference."

"How?"

"Ah! one was nothing, some trick of thought-photography we're not in touch with; at least, so I told myself; but the other was all. She desired me, despaired of me, died for me! that was herself!"

"Did it frighten you?"

"No, I think not. It stunned me. I felt it was the end. It stamped itself red and broad across my brain, as a signet crushes out the wax, so that every thought afterwards must show some part of the pattern. I fought it for a month, with that shadow of death between me and my fellows, and an empty chair beside me at every feast, but only for a month. Then I made my bow to the big audience I loved so well, to the woman I worshipped, and came down here."

He shivered as he spoke. I wiped the heat and, possibly, the fear from my face, and looked out over the sea.

"What do you make of it?" he asked presently.

"Not much," I said; "the eye-glass beats me, and the coincidence of that appearance with her death, you being a complete stranger to the fact, would be astounding as coincidence. Of course a doctor says everything of the sort must be eyes or brain. There may be something wrong with the sight which causes you to see the thing which is not; that is fairly common; people see spectral cats, or donkeys, and so forth, but we consider them sane so long as they know what they are looking at, and don't desire to stroke or ride them. Or a man's eyes may be all right, and the mischief further in, making him fancy things that are not; that is mania of a sort also common enough, but its victim may be perfectly sane otherwise, and is called so if he is conscious of his delusions, but when he begins to mew to the cat or cut sticks for the donkey, we shut him up."

"I see, and are those the only two causes of trouble?"

"Oh, no, the causes are many, but they work out at the top in much the same way."

"Yes, but if my eyes are amiss, how does my glass help them? If the trouble is inside, nothing outside can define it."

"No, I admit that."

"And if my brain is the traitor, why should it go wrong that very day, the first on which some other theory becomes possible? Doesn't that stagger you?"

"It certainly stretches the tether of chances."

"Besides, if this thing were an illusion, wouldn't memory



come in somewhere? Shouldn't I be likely to re-see the woman as I was used to see her? Don't delusions make their bricks for the most part of remembered straw, and, further, would not one's previous notions of beauty and canons of taste count for something?"

"Probably."

"But they don't! I see the woman as God made her; I see her changed from the colour of life, not to the white of death, but to the hue of some imprisoned light I could not match in the rainbow. Is that likely as an illusion? And is it not less so that so unhuman, so bizarre a creature should at once impose itself on one as resistlessly beautiful?"

"I think there is not so much in that," I said; "one often sees in dreams what seems to be outside experience, and all sorts of strange admirations are possible in trance."

"But this is no trance," he said.

"Perhaps not, but it might be."

"Trance! do I seem entranced?"

"No, not now, but the motion of the sea at night might have an hypnotic effect?"

He laughed.

"What are you going to do here?" I asked.

"To do? I'm done with doing. What view do you think the high court of common talk would hold of a man who loved to distraction a floating ghost of the sea? There's only one alternative to the head that wears a crush hat in such cases—you must be mad, or it must be ignorant; I needn't tell you which it takes. Do! no, I remain. I don't know what you doctors call this," holding up a lean bloodless hand, "but I shan't run to much more of it."

No man knows another's trouble; even the heart often knows of its own bitterness only the scald and strain. I said what I could, not of comfort, none was possible, but of pity, which I felt from my soul.

"But you don't believe me," he mourned.

"Give me time," I pleaded; "we're on such broken ground in these matters at present, that one doubts every foot-print. I've never found cause to believe in spirits, and my conversion at such short notice would be worth very little. Have you seen nothing more?"

"More," he said slowly; "I wonder sometimes if there *can* be more. I have seen the sea grow white with the faces of the dead, as the shallows grow white in storm. For the sea is full of the dead, of the faces of the dead that are drowned; some mere

trails and wisps of things with eyes, some fearfully imperfect, some beautiful. They tear to and fro like caged beasts within the waves, not heeding each other, but staring into the air, and their faces are not as ours, but sharp as the stript passions of men."

"How have you seen these things?" I inquired.

"Bit by bit; first a shadow, then a light, then a face; some come and go, some stay; many, perhaps, I do not see, for there is often a stirring in the sea which I cannot understand."

"Do you see them by day?"

"I have seen them faintly, not often."

"You think they are there always?"

"Certainly."

"Did it strike you that these further visions somewhat discounted the reality of the first?"

"No, why? If there is one ghost in the sea, there must be many; its dead are many."

"Yes, but why should you see them by degrees? That looks like sympathetic extension along whatever diseased nerve or fibre produced the first appearance."

"The eye sees what it has learnt to see," he said absently, "almost what it is told to see. The lens only brings the picture in to the plate, and the plate is sensitised by our brains; we see what we have the wit to see. Look!" He waved his hat, and a cloud of startled birds rose suddenly at the edge of the sea, and swirled to and fro in dispersing sheets of shaded whiteness. "What have you seen?"

"Birds," I said.

"Aye, but what! Did you see the dunlins wheel from white to grey, or the pigmy curlews by their bills and tail-coverts, or the redshank by his stripes, the sea-pie's bill, or the peewit's crest? You saw none of these! Why? They were there, I saw them all."

"I understand," I said; "but men have pointed out to me blue fishes in broad daylight crawling over their boots."

"Oh, come!" he interrupted, "my argument was that things of real existence might be invisible till we learnt to see them."

"Yes," I said, "I understand."

### III.

We lunched together in the cottage on bacon, porridge, broad beans, and potatoes—cold, the fire having expired, and Melton being too indifferent to re-light it. And I could remember when

he would have refused an ortolan that lacked quince in the cooking.

While we ate, he proposed I should prolong my stay a couple of days.

"Though there is nothing to see here but me," he added plaintively.

"That will be enough," I replied.

"I believe," he hazarded with a smile, "you are the same old broker in curios as ever, and I am the last."

We sat in the rough porch while I smoked a pipe, and afterwards climbed out along the jagged ledges of rocks to the edge of the sea. It stretched from us four thousand miles to the cities of the New World, and rose for the first quarter mile in a foaming flight of white steps, which rose steep in storm and fell thunderously, so that the noise of them far inland was like the sullen roar of guns.

The tide was running now, and went past us straining and plunging towards the shore. The sun dropped red into a ditch of clouds, and burnt the watery sky above him to a fierce strong glow, which turned the sea in its turn to a flood of purple dye. The colour ran eastward, and we faced about to watch it, in Melton's phrase, "play the fool with everything."

"Listen!" he said abruptly.

I could hear nothing but the rush of the waves.

"The ground swell is rising," he explained; "it is only a whisper now, but it will howl before midnight. Hello! What's that?"

It seemed nothing to my eyes, as I followed the direction of his, but a white angle in a ledge of rock just reached by the sea.

"It's a man's arms," he said.

"Rubbish!" I retorted, "it's a bent quartz vein."

But as I spoke the water pushed it forward.

"Well, it's a quartz vein that will have to be buried," he replied, "so we may as well go for it at once."

I saw, as we came nearer, that he was right. The water in the gully was rocking a man's body along its narrow trough; the arms were raised, and the hands clasped tightly together above its head in some last wild appeal to a deliverer. They were stiff now as wood, but there was in them an agony more terrible than stared from the eyes; their failure seemed fixed there with a kind of malice.

Melton picked his way along the upper shelf of the cleavage, and tried to lift the body by the neck of its jersey, but the stuff gave way.

"Lend a hand, will you?" he cried, "we must carry it fore and aft between us."

It was no easy matter walking along that knife edge, with the water pulsing over one's boots, and those poor sodden limbs swaying between us, and Melton slipped once into a crevice above his thighs; but we managed to get on easier ground and carried the drowned man up to the border of the dunes.

Melton stooped down, turning the body over in search of some clue to its identity. Used as I am to death, there seemed something callous in his treatment. He peered into the eyes.

"Swede," he hazarded.

"Close them!" I said.

He looked up sharply.

"You don't like it?" he inquired.

"No, I don't! and I prefer to treat the dead with more respect."

He smiled, and his smile was sadder than the dead man's despair, but he drew the lids down quietly, and laid its limbs together. I placed two shells on the eyes, and as I rose, Melton passed his arm into mine and we left the body there, slanting, facing the west, and tinged with the last dull purple light.

"It's only a body," remarked my companion after a pause, musingly, and, I thought, with apology.

"A man's body," I said.

"Man's body or dog's body; there's no odds in bodies."

"I don't agree with you," I replied.

"No, I suppose not, because neither you nor your friends believe in immortality with all your wits; you say man has a soul and a body, but the fact is that man is a soul in a body. Could you see, as I do, the souls of men naked in the sea, you would not trouble about their eye-balls."

I said I considered funeral sentiment merely an extension of tenderness to the most helpless, a loyalty in compassion, but he disagreed; it was fear, he said, fear and doubt, and to change the subject I asked if there had been any wreck to account for the remains.

"There was a boat sunk under the island two days ago, run down; they sent notice of it along the coast, and Tom has been on the lookout I believe; he makes something from these finds."

I had been hungry, but ate little supper; the recovery of corpses does not better one's appetite, and I was bothered by a disquieting resemblance between the horror in the dead man's eyes and a look I had seen once or twice in Melton's.

"Tom," said the latter, to our host during the meal, "there's a body on the south barrows."

"Aye, and how kem it there, sir?" asked the man.

"We hauled it out of the water for you; came down channel, I fancy."

"Rent, sir?"

"No, drowned quiet by the look of it; possibly one of that boat's crew—the *Sea-gull's*, was it?"

"Aye, aye, vury laike, vury laike. Them that go daun to sea in ships," he murmured, treading vaguely through the verse, as though conceiving that the fitness of things in such accidents demanded scriptural balance.

"Ah, Tom," said Dick Melton sadly, "there are wonders in the deep waters stranger than ever that singer dreamed of."

After supper we sat talking of times past and of things gone for good and bad, till Melton rose suddenly with an air of nervous apprehension, and, begging me to excuse him, went out. The old couple beside the fire watched him and shook their heads. I laid a fore-finger interrogatively to my own.

"Lor! bless you naw, sir," said the wife decisively, "naaght wrang there. A straange gent'man is Mister Malten, but's got's wits and to plenty."

They gossiped together of their lodger, ignoring me, but in acknowledgment, it seemed, of my interest. They had clearly no doubts as to his sanity, and treated his salving of the corpse as proof of an improvement in his economic ideas. Their talk wandered to other such derelicts with unpleasant precision of detail, though they seemed to enjoy it, and showed incidentally a fund of rough pity and pious trust in the benignity of other men's misfortunes.

#### IV.

Melton's forecast had been fulfilled, and one could hear the slow continual thunder of the surf deepen as the tide laid open the river mouth to the sea, and over it the hoarser trumpeting of the bar. The boom of water that breaks on water through a mile of beaten foam is very different from the clash of water that breaks on shore; there is a deadly softness in it that smothers sound, and deadlier strength.

I listened alone for about an hour, while its note crept down among the deepening seas, and then a womanish fear of my own company overcame me, and I went out.



Water was running close to the cottage where in the morning had been a triple bank of sand: I dipped my fingers into it and put them to my mouth; the taste was brackish.

The tide had dammed the river back and forced it out across the fields. I walked on to the little wooden bridge which spanned a dried elbow of the stream, but it was covered by the flood. Clearly Melton had not turned north, so I faced towards the lower margin of the dunes where the dead man lay. I passed it with a shudder, and a little further on found Melton standing by the edge of the dim waste of foam which seemed to slant upwards into the sky; his hands were thrust into his pockets, and he was staring out across the sea. I thought he would start at my touch, but instead I had to shake him.

He looked round at me dully.

"What's up?" he shouted through the pounding of the sea.

"Nothing—nothing!" I called back, "only a bit lonely!"

He caught hold of my arm, and walked me back from the shore.

"Lonely?" he said, when the roar ceased to choke our words, "with all that company!" and he nodded towards the sea; "I wish I could introduce you."

I wished nothing less; that company, even at second-hand, seemed undesirable.

"He is there to-night," he went on; "your friend with the eyes; I wonder what it was they saw. Pious people fancy that the drowning edit a review of their past lives during its last half-second; but that is one of their many kind arrangements which don't always come off. I have been pulled out of the water, drowned as far as any consciousness went, and all I can remember thinking of was a row of poached eggs, which was curious, because one generally sees them in a circle, a shape which might have entitled them to consideration as an intimation of immortality."

He spoke in a drawling nervous way, different from his common speech, which always bit.

"I suppose you expected to find me raving somewhere along the sands to an inapparent audience of little fishes," he continued; "I'm afraid you've missed that exhibition, though I do rave sometimes; that is permitted, you know, to a lover. I've even stood waist-deep in this water to kiss the ripple which seemed to be her mouth, and to see the gold light on her arms run round me. Oh! I've played the fool to perfection and with complete perception. I've felt the wet chill through my clothes, and considered the nuisance of changing them as I waded out to my goddess." He sighed, and then said in an altered way, "come, you're cold; let us go in!"

He turned as we left the bay, flung back his face, and sang out to the rolling seas :

"Good-night !"

"Don't think me mad," he said, "on that account ; it's matter of habit and courtesy. It strikes me if all this were pure fancy, I should sometimes hear a reply."

"You never do?"

"Never! No word or whisper have I ever heard, though there's provocation enough, God knows. Surely, if there's any self-persuasion possible in the matter, it might come in there? Why, I've watched her mouth purse round the pet words she used to use, and seen them written in her eyes, and yet heard nothing, though the seas were crying 'Sweet' from shoal to shoal." He turned on the threshold of the door. "Ah, me! and to think that all of it may but be a slackened spirt of blood across my brain."

I stayed there the day following, and have since wished heartily I had not. I was, in fact, somewhat ashamed of myself, and wanted to see my philosophy come back on the spot. It did not come, however.

As the day went on, I began to feel my companion's presence in a curious way. It was not alone that he was there, but as though something were happening about him, a movement which one felt with an unknown sense, but felt as consciously as a draught of air.

I told myself it was ridiculous ; that it was not in reason and could not be in nature ; but arguments against one's senses are as useless as firelight to a man with an ague ; and a glance at the strange transference of Melton's face did not mend matters ; there is nothing in reason nor in nature to make the flesh of a healthy man like brown water, but something had done it.

We sat and talked all day. It seemed futile enough at times to discuss the world's progress with one who had stepped off its path and would never lift a hand to stay or move it more ; but it was of interest to him. He reverted only once to the trouble which had brought his sentence of banishment, and it was of a graver sentence that he spoke.

"You ask for how long I am here. You ought to be able to tell me that. I am here for as long as I last."

I interposed something in protest, not very coherent, I imagine, for he said :

"You remind me of the Irishman who was certain when his friend had been sentenced for life, that he would not live half the time. I am here for life, and I shall not live the half ; will you forgive me if I ask you a favour on the strength of it? Yes?"

"Go on."

"When my 'Weighed and found wanting' is written, will you come if I send you word? I am not afraid, but just a bit shy of death—this death. It's a stupid request, but I should like to have you here if you could come—to see me off."

I said, with the conventional insincerity men use towards death, that he had many years before him; but that I would come from any quarter of the world when the word reached me of his need.

"I thought you would," he said.

After supper we went out together; he even locked his arm in mine. The night was clear, but wandering clots of cloud, black against the deep night-blue, were floating in from the sea. The stars flickered round them like the points of spears.

Held so close to my companion, I felt, or thought I felt, a dull vibration in him; it was a vibration and not a pulse, but I failed in any way to define it.

"It is so strange," he said as we went along, "if these things are really here and not the bad jokes of my brain, that you cannot see them. Mountain loads of fiery chariots may have required second sight, but it seems incredible that the ring of light out there should be invisible to anyone."

"Where?"

"About half a mile off the point; due west."

"I daresay; but most people can see a moonbeam."

He looked at me with a curious smile.

"Seldom one so much refracted," he said; "the moon won't be up for two hours."

I gazed at the strange glow steadily for a full minute; it lay on the water in an irregular plait, as the colour of moonlight, but brighter at its outward edges.

"Look here," I said, wrenching my arm from his, "I didn't stay here to see your ghosts, and if you've any confounded way of making them visible, I hope you'll drop it."

"I have no way," he replied in a low voice, "and I would not for worlds you should learn to see them if I had. Ah, my God, no! one is enough. Come, let us go indoors."

As he spoke the light slowly faded, burnt up again an instant, and disappeared. We parted at the door; he went back to the sea. I tried to sleep. But I did not succeed, and I lay by my open window till the plovers' call came from the shore and the east grew yellow; then I got up and lit a pipe.

Melton came in about two hours later with the early dawn. He seemed utterly exhausted, and staggered. He held out his hand.

"You're not offended, are you?" he said.

I took his hand and pressed it, more sorry for him than could be said. He returned my pressure faintly, and sat down beside me, holding my hand.

Before the sun was hot we had breakfasted in his little room overlooking the grey sea, and I set out once more upon my way.

\* \* \* \*

Nothing reached me from that desolate haven for ten full months. Then, one morning in early spring, a telegram was forwarded me from town with the one word "Come!" I should have understood it without the soft name of the Cornish post-town on the sheet; and started west at once. My absence from home lost me the express, and left me to be dragged over the slow miles at my journey's end into the early hours of the morning. I was able, however, to charter a gig at once, and started by daybreak for the long hilly drive towards the sea.

When we pulled up at the head of that sandy valley, the day was hot and calm, with a faint veil seawards of mist. I pushed on hurriedly to the cottage, and found the two old people sitting in the kitchen, the woman's arms lying limp on the white scrubbed table, the man's by his side.

They looked the picture of palsied fear, lifted their heads together with a jerk as I entered, and said without further greeting:

"He's out!"

The quaint absurdity of it struck me, anxious as I was. The woman's head dropped forward as I turned to go, and she groaned out—

"Eh, I've seen sech things!"

I went rapidly along the lower line of the dunes, and then, finding nothing, turned north across the stream. My ideas were so fixed on a walking figure, that I almost passed unnoticed the body of a man lying flat on the wet sand between the barrows and the ebbing sea. I ran forward, and kneeled beside it; but that which had been Dick Melton was passed for ever beyond reach or need of help.

He had fallen with his face towards the sea, his arms flung out before him. He must have dropped in the thinnest film of the retreating tide, for his sleeves were soaked on the under side. His face was buried between his arms, and I think he had drowned in about half an inch of water, but owing to his exhausted condition nothing but an opinion was possible, and the inquest doctors would only certify to syncope.

I have fancied that, knowing he was near his end, he had flung

himself forward into the sea, hoping by a like death to be united to the woman he had once loved so ill; but that he died thus is only surmise, for the very effort may have cost him his life. Yet one wishes to think that those poor lovers, whatever the meaning of his strange vision, in their deaths at least were not divided, for, truly, remorse of love never paid its debt more fully.

He had begged for burial among the sand dunes of the shore, but the law forbade him that and laid him, still within sound of the sea, beside the little church in the combe. It stands, as it has stood for nine centuries, squarely and bravely against the fierce blasts of the storm, among a scanty and prayerless people—the furthest outwork in God's war. And from lichened archways above his grave, Saxon ghouls peer still through the driven mist, after the nights and days of a thousand years; while beneath them, the foam sheet thickens, and the echoes of its thunders drown into silence the imprisoned ghosts of the sea.

FRANCIS PREVOST.





## The Devil's Own.

By LILLIAS CAMPBELL DAVIDSON.

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To every life there comes its consummation of bliss—the very crowning and pinnacle of well-being ; looking back at which, 'twixt smiles and tears, we say, with yearning and regretful heart, “Ah ! then, at least, for however brief a space, I was perfectly happy.”

That consummation was mine one radiant day in June, as I walked over the springing heather on Aulus Moor with Harry Curzon.

For we had been engaged three days—three golden days snatched from Paradise ; but it was only the night before that my dear old father gave his careful consent, and this was our very first walk together as openly declared lovers.

What a walk it was ! Far off, beyond the verge of farthest moorland, the burnished line of sea gleamed like a band of molten gold. Overhead, the piled up banks of cloud had a lining of lurid pink, and hung heavily against their background of liquid blue. There was a storm coming : but what is a thunder-storm when you've just promised to marry the man you love with all your whole heart ?

Harry carried the basket. I was taking some of mamma's famous lentil soup to poor old widow Reynolds,—and we walked,—well, as close together as people might be excused for doing, under the circumstances. We had such a lot to talk about !—the day we first met, just two months ago, at the regimental sports, and how Harry fell in love at first sight—or so he vowed—and felt like knocking down Captain Trevor when he reached me first with a strawberry ice, and ran for the cream for my tea. I felt rather grieved, after this, to confess that I hadn't noticed Harry a bit that day ; and it was only after Mrs. Jacob's tennis, ten days later, when he walked home with me, and carried my racquet and shoes, that I had first begun to think—to wonder—to—well, never mind !

The clouds had gathered thicker and blacker as we reached Mrs. Reynolds' moss-grown thatched cottage, and we were barely inside when the big drops began to patter down. Privately, I

don't think Mrs. Reynolds felt all the regret she expressed at our being caught in a summer shower, for she dearly loved a little gossip, and seldom had a chance to indulge her tastes in this lonely locality, where the carrier only passed twice a week, and her nearest neighbour lived a mile away, across a very unsafe ford.

I had to answer no end of inquiries as to the physical well-being of all my family and relatives to the remotest degree, and tell her six distinct times that I was quite free, myself, from all bodily infirmity, before she was content to let the conversation take a more general character.

"And how's the new housemaid doin'?" was her next question, after I had succeeded in artfully leading her from more personal topics, in dread lest she should begin researches of an embarrassing nature into Harry's and my relations towards each other. "Doin' well, is she? Well, well—I'm main glad to hear it. I must say I never much expected it. 'Laws,' says I, 'what can you look for in a wench named Pinnick?' Butter don't come from lard—now do it?"

"Perhaps not," said I, not wishing to commit myself over even what seemed an evident enough proposition. "But Pinnick isn't such a bad name, Mrs. Reynolds—not very pretty, perhaps; but that doesn't much matter."

"Matter?—Not a farthing, Miss, as to beauty; but a deal of matter other ways. Never did I know a Pinnick that hadn't a bad strain. There was Job Pinnick, the sheep-stealer, as was hanged on the moor here by the headstone cross when I was a gell; and Hannah Copley, as was as Pinnick before she married, and poisoned her husband after; and them two Pinnicks as lived, neighbours to me at the Jews' Camp, and sold themselves to the Old One."

"Really!" said Harry, who, perched on a rush-bottomed chair, and holding his hat in that attitude of instant departure peculiar to the morning caller, had hitherto been engaged in meditative study of the mourning cards with which the cottage walls were lavishly decorated; "that was a mild thing to do. What price did they get—anything worth while?"

The widow Reynolds declined to treat the subject with any levity.

"The gentleman may believe me, or he may not believe me," she remarked, with deep solemnity. "What I went through and experienced myself I must hold with, was it never so. Which I'll tell you, Miss Kitty," she went on, turning her look of reproach from Harry to me. "And your own father as is a reverend can

tell you as I told the tale to him the very same thirty years ago come Martinmas—the year it took place, when both of us was a deal younger than to-day.”

I'm afraid I did not hail the relation with any wild joy; but that appeared to matter little to Mrs. Reynolds, whose cap frills rose and fell as her head began to waggle to and fro, in the excitement of her narration.

“It was thirty year this Midsummer, and I hadn't long been a widow of my first, poor Joe Bowers, as likely a lad as ever walked at the plough-tail. I was a-livin' then in one of them two thatched cottages as stood just inside the Jews' Camp, a mile or more from here—you may see the pile of ruins now. I wouldn't have lived in a dree spot like that, let alone Pinnicks for neighbours in the other house, only poverty sends strange bedfellows, as the sayin' is, and the rent was low. Nobody had a good word for they Pinnicks, and I kept myself to myself, for there was strange tales afloat. Folks said as there'd been a child by a marriage afore—she was a widow when Seth Pinnick married her—a fine likely little chap as died strange, somehow; and folks fought shy of Pinnick, as was a surly brute, and hedged and ditched for Squire Berthon. Well, they did me no harm, and I'd lived there three months or more, quiet enough, but for the shrieks and cries when Seth came home o' Saturday nights from the Doncaster Arms, and had it out o' her after, when all at once the black death broke out in the houses down by the stagnant pool betwixt this and Aulus' ford, and the place was in a panic. Seth Pinnick had been drinking with some of they men from down there, and the next thing was, he and Sally was both down with it too. Miss Kitty, there wasn't a soul as would go anigh their cottage; and I thinks, thinks I, 'I'm a lone woman, and a neighbour; and if the Almighty means me die, I'll get it as soon livin' next door as a-tending them': so I went in and nursed 'em both.

“Laws, my dear! it was as bad a time as ever I did see! Both of 'em was ravin' out of their heads when I got in, and not a bit or drop in the house, nor a soul to help one. My niece Eliza promised to come up every day to the headstone cross and bring me a basket of bread and such-like, but save for that I didn't see a livin' soul. Less 'n two days Seth died—he was a'most past speech when I went in—but he shrieked wild-like without stoppin' till his breath was well-nigh out of him, and all his strength. Mercy on us! it chilled my blood!—and that night I saw Sally was goin' too. I'll never forget that night till my own death-bed comes! There was a storm outside—rain and thunder, and wind

enough to lift the roof; and there that poor sinful woman lay, ravin' and muttering' and singin'—enough to turn you cold!

“I got the Book, and I sat by the chimney-corner, and I tried to read—but I couldn't see a line. I was well-nigh frightened silly, what with the storm and Sally. All at once, about midnight, she fell quite still and hushed: and then all at once she began to speak out strong and clear.

Miss Kitty, the words seemed to pass me in my dread, but as sure as I sit here I made out, while my teeth chattered, and I shook so I nearly dropped the rushlight, a tale that struck me dumb with horror. It was all about a child—a little lad—and as how Squire Berthon swore he'd have no children in them cottages to 'harry the game; and as how Seth came home and told her as he wasn't a-goin' to lose a good place for a brat's sake, and there'd be a way to settle. Then there came something about starving, and a strong lad, long to die that way, and Seth in a temper, and out of patience to wait—and a black mark round a thin little neck—and how he'd bound her by a Jew's shillin' never to tell. Miss Kitty, my child! I fair turned sick with fright. Not for a hundred pounds would I have stopped a minute longer in that room! I got up to turn and fly, never heedin' the storm and the wind—anywhere out of that place of blood! But just as I stood up out o' my chair, as it might be just so as I'm doing now, Sally flung out her hand and clutched tight hold on my gown, and sat up sudden, strong and straight, with her eyes wide open. ‘Mrs. Bowers,’ she says, wild-like, ‘you're a good woman, I doubt. Take this shillin'’—and she reached one from under her pillow—‘and give it to lame Billy when I'm gone. He begged at my door last Easter-tide, and I drove him with a curse,’ she says, ‘and now I'm sorry,’ says she, ‘and I'd like to do one good deed afore I die.’ And with that she reached me out the shillin', but my hand shook so it dropped from it, and fell on the open Book instead. I just saw as how it was a Jew's penny, and not a real shillin' at all, when there came the most terrible clap of thunder as ever I heard—and a flash as filled the room. There was a roar of bricks fallin', and timbers givin', and a smell of burnin' and sulphur. Sally Pinnick gave one great cry, and fell back dead on the pillow; and as for me, I just tore out o' the house, and ran through the rain and the blast to Dewsbury, three mile or more away. I was drenched and tore and sore bemired as ever I got there; but there I found shelter and a roof with my niece Elizabeth. And betimes, next morn, I was ashamed o' my fears, in the sunlight, and I fared back to do the last for the poor dead creature, and see to my own empty house. Will you



believe, Miss Kitty, I found the place a heap o' bricks and timbers? They said the lightning had struck the roof, and the gale did the rest; but anyhow, I made way to creep to poor Sally's death-room, and that was not so rent as the rest. Only the bed, and she in it, lay piled with bricks from the chimney, that you couldn't see it. 'Yet,' thinks I, 'she laid a charge on me with her last words, and I'll keep it': so I sought for that Jew's penny high and low. They're real siller, I heard Squire Berthon's lady say once, and worth a mint; but though I moved the sticks, and lifted the rag carpet—aye, and swept out the room, and even scoured it; and peered into every chink and cranny—not a sign of that bit o' money saw I from that day to this. No, Miss Kitty, nor ever shall; for if ever the Old One claimed his own, he came and fetched away the shillin' she bound her soul by, that blessed Midsummer night."

"But what did you do for a house, Mrs. Reynolds?" I murmured, when my lips could find their use. 'Yours was ruined too, wasn't it?'

"Eh, I bid with my niece Elizabeth till Reynolds asked me, and then I came out here. No more o' the Jews' Camp for me, Miss Kitty! But just you tell the Mistress at the Rectory not to put too much faith in a Pinnick, my dear, and to count the knobs o' sugar, now and again."

"Odd," said Harry, when we were once more on our way over the moorland, where every sprig of heather now glistened with its diamond drop, and the hot sun was drawing up a quivering mist from the soaked earth—"odd what a lot of superstition still lingers about in country districts. Rum little story, wasn't it, Kitten? I didn't dare catch your eye, for fear of laughing."

"Laughing?"—I gave a little shudder—"I thought it perfectly awful. And a Jew's penny it was, too. How very strange. One could almost believe there's something in it, after all."

"Something in what?"

"Oh, the old legend about the Jews' Camp. Did you never hear it? Why, you know there's a Roman camp here—you'll see it in another minute—Dewcaster its real name is; but all the country people call it the Jews' Camp, and papa says the corrupted name gave rise to the story. Any way, the legend runs that when the Romans under Aulus Plautius conquered this place, there was a soldier of the legion who had taken part in the sacking of Jerusalem and got, as part of his booty, the thirty pieces of silver, which had been ever since in the family of the man who sold the Potter's Field. They say that money is the devil's own, and whoever possesses it is ruined, body and soul. The soldier who had it was



murdered by his comrades for his hoard, and with it they bribed their fellow warriors to kill their own centurion in battle, and place one of themselves in his stead. He turned on his confederates, once he was in power, and would have put them to death, but they fled, carrying the money with them; and finally returned with an army of British, and enough of the pieces of silver still unsquandered to buy from a traitor inside the camp its betrayal, and the slaughter of all its defenders. The other pieces were melted down, or passed into other circulation, still carrying the curse with them, to this day; but the ones here are still found, from time to time, and always there has been some horrible story connected with every one that sees the light. My father says it is the large number of Roman coins found about Dewcaster that gave rise to the legend; like Onion's pennies at Silchester. But the poor people believe it firmly, and say that the real names of the places about are Judasbury, and Judas-camp, or the Jews' Camp. It's very odd, Harry. And here's the camp itself."

"A gruesome hole," said Harry. And certainly the square depression on the barren hill-top, without a tree to break the wide brown sea of moor, was desolate and wild enough for any tale of tragedy. The pile of grass-grown ruins that still marked the scene of Mrs. Reynolds' story lay under the shadow of tangled gorse and broom. We strolled across the weird enclosure, to see how the little spring, swollen by the heavy rain, had burst its banks and torn a channel through the ground below. There had been a sort of miniature landslip, and the fresh wet earth was upturned for several yards. As I stood talking to Harry I wondered what was the strange round object I idly turned over with the toe of my shoe. Suddenly I stooped, and picked it up.

"There!" I said; "why that's one of the very coins I was telling you about. Papa says they're as plentiful as blackberries." And I held it out to Harry as I spoke.

"Jove, so it is!" said he. "That's queer." He rubbed it on his coat-sleeve, and stuck knowingly in his eye the little magnifying glass he examines flowers through. "It's a genuine antique. I can just make out *Ti Cæsar*. I believe you've had a real find, Kits, and the first thing you ever gave me is really worth having. I'll put it on my watch-chain, and wear it as long as I live—your first dear little present."

"Oh, Harry! you mustn't—please don't. Suppose it were to be a Jew's penny!"

"You dear little goose! Are you really a superstitious Kitten? Is our future household to be conducted on non-Friday principles, and are all our dinner-parties to collapse if there's a fear of our

sitting down thirteen to table? Oh, Kitty! Never mind, even a Jew's penny would bring good luck if it came from you; and wild horses sha'n't tear from me your very first gift. You never gave me a single thing before—except your darling self, and that sweet something last night at the garden gate. I've given you dozens—and a ring; but you never gave me but that one, and refused me that rose I begged for from your gown at Mrs. Jacobs' tennis-fight. Kitty, give me your little hand. One ring looks too meagre there—let me get the other one, and put it on to make it look balanced."

"Nonsense, Harry!" I blushed violently, and tried to snatch my fingers away, but he held them fast. "What rubbish to say such things! That needn't be talked about for ages."

"Ages! the days are ages—what on earth have we to wait for? Thank fortune I'm not a beggar, and you won't mind a sub for a husband, will you, darling? I haven't even any people for you to be introduced to, and you don't need any gown but that you play tennis in—I'd like you to wear that always. When will you wear it to be married in, Kits? Next Tuesday?—come, dear, say which day."

"Harry!" I cried, startled and horrified, "don't be so silly. It isn't time to talk of that yet—indeed it isn't. You mustn't be so peremptory. You never talked like this before."

"Peremptory!" He spoke quite shortly. "I don't believe you understand. I don't want any waiting, whatever you may do. I don't believe you love me as I do you, or you couldn't even talk of it. That isn't love worth having."

"Oh, Harry!" was all I could say, and the tears sprang to my eyes.

In an instant his arms were round me, and he was begging me to forgive him.

"Good heavens!" he said, "how could I ever have said such a thing! How could I be such a brute! I don't know what possessed me. Say you forgive me, my own little love."

Of course I forgave him, and we walked on over the moor hand-in-hand, talking gently and tenderly at first, though by-and-by Harry began to grow silent and abstracted. It was very unlike Harry—as unlike him as his sudden burst of temper—he had the gayest, sunniest spirits, and a mood that was generally unruffled and serene. But I knew men have often things to worry them that we girls know nothing of; and I knew too that beginning to bother him now was not the way to make him a good wife by-and-by. So I said nothing, and was only very kind to him when we parted, to show him that my silence had not been resentment.

I thought he would have walked over from Dewsbury the next day; but it was Friday before I saw him swing open the little gate into the meadow, and come up the side path under the perfumed lime-blossoms. He looked pale and rather worried, and I anxiously asked if there were anything amiss, when our first greetings were over.

"I think I must have caught a chill that day on the moor," he said. "I haven't felt quite myself ever since. I'm restless and out of sorts altogether somehow, and feel as if there were a weight on me that I can't shake off. Fancy my being such a duffer, when I ought to be the happiest fellow in the whole world! But somehow I can't help it, Kitty."

Before he went away he showed me the Roman coin, cleaned and burnished, and hanging on his watch-chain beside the new sixpence he wore there for a joke—"for luck," he always said.

"It's really a good coin, Kitten," he said—"one of Tiberius', and in capital condition. How about the Jew's penny, eh, little girl?"

"No," I said, "I know it isn't. I asked papa, and he told me all about it; and though it's commonly supposed those terrible thirty pieces were Roman, he says they probably weren't. I couldn't understand all about the *denarii* and *shekels*, but he says the Temple tax was always paid in Jewish money, so the priests were more likely to have only Attic coinage in their possession. So I don't mind now, Harry dear—wear the little thing as long as you like."

I was a good deal surprised not to see him for another week. I had a hurried note or two from him, telling me he was unable to get over to the Rectory, and lamenting the separation. There were words of passionate fondness always, yet the language was so unlike Harry, somehow—so abrupt and almost disconnected, that I should have felt a little anxious about him, only that I told myself it was silly to worry over trifles, and I heard he had been over to the Stockton races on the regimental drag, and to a pigeon match with some of the officers. I hate pigeon-shooting, and I was a little sorry to hear of that, and rather astonished at his having gone; and Cousin Dick, when he came back from Stockton, asked me if Curzon were out of sorts, or what? He had been very hilarious at the races, but seemed in a queer sort of temper as well. It was like one of Cousin Dick's amiable remarks, and so was his suggestion that the Second Wiltshire brewed extra-powerful champagne cup; so I treated him and his relation with silent scorn, though I couldn't help being a little unhappy too.

However, one's powers of fretting are considerably dulled by

the rose-coloured mist of a happy love dream, and Harry's devotion atoned for everything in the one hurried visit he paid me that week. It was in the evening, and he said he had heaps of work and couldn't stay long; but he was so full of self-reproach for Stockton and the pigeons, and so caressing and fond in his contrition, that I was quite happy, and only remembered afterwards that there had been a certain something unlike himself.

"I haven't been a bit the thing since that chill I took the other day," he said, at parting; "I never felt so queer before. Do you think a chill could possibly affect one's head a little, darling?"

"I'll ask papa what he thinks," said I, being used to consider my father's judgment infallible.

"Good heavens, Kit! What can a parson know about one's liver! They meddle enough already with things that don't concern them. Don't incite them to further efforts."

It was so like his speech that day on the moor that I shrank back a little, half-startled.

"Then see a doctor about it," I said, a little coldly, in spite of myself.

"I will, I think. Good-night, my darling;" and with a fervent embrace he was gone.

My dear old father was to preach at the Dewsbury garrison church on the Sunday—a duty in which he took a simple delight, for he had been an army chaplain in the Crimea, and dearly loved a red coat. I begged hard to go with him, for I loved the garrison church with its band and the hearty singing from a thousand warrior-throats—and then I knew Harry was to help take the men there, and I did so enjoy seeing him in uniform; but I had a little cold, and it threatened rain, so my father would not let me go. I was watching for him when he returned, and ran to help him off with his macintosh, for the rain had fulfilled its threat. He was very silent and absent as I undid the fastenings; but as I took the dripping thing to hang it on its peg, he suddenly drew me close to him, macintosh and all, and kissed me. It was so seldom he did that, except for "good-night" and "good-morning," that I looked up surprised, and met his eyes fixed on me with a troubled and tender look which filled me with a vague alarm.

"Poor little Kathleen! poor little girl!" he murmured, half to himself; and then he walked hastily away to his study, and shut himself in.

I looked in bewilderment at Cousin Dick, who had come home with my father to luncheon, as he often did on Sundays, and saw



that he was regarding me with a gaze in which there was a certain exultation.

"What on earth is the matter?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing astonishing," responded Dick, with affected indifference. "Only what any one might have expected, if they'd only listened to me. Curzon was roaring drunk at church-parade this morning, and insulted my uncle to his face—that's all."

For a moment I stared at him incredulously. Then—"It's a shameful falsehood!" I cried, and darted into the study after papa.

With one arm about my shoulders as I knelt by his side, my burning face pressed against his knee, he told me very gently, very tenderly, that it was the dreadful truth. Every one had noticed how strange my poor boy looked when he first arrived at church, and all through the service he had seemed hardly able to sit still; but when the sermon began he had suddenly burst out into loud and scornful laughter, and rising from his seat, sauntered out, whistling under his breath.

"He is hardly more than a boy," said my father, in a voice of deep grief, "and a man may sometimes feel an extra glass at the mess-table more at his age than he would if he were older; but to be the worse for drink at noon on a Sunday morning, and to set an example like that to his men!"

"But Harry!" I sobbed—"Papa, it isn't possible! Why you know he hardly ever touches anything stronger than water, and they call him the blue-ribboner in the regiment!"

"Yes, no doubt for that very reason he would be more readily affected than another man. Drunk?—Oh, there can't be a doubt of it! Put it to yourself, Kathleen, my child—Would an officer and a gentleman conduct himself in such a manner in the House of God if he were sober? I am very greatly distressed, on your behalf, my little girl. Colonel Maylands may perhaps hush up this matter in consideration for the son of his old friend, but it concerns me deeply to consider whether your happiness would be safe in the hands of a young man who has let himself be overtaken as Harry Curzon has to-day. If I should find him inclined to intemperate habits, my duty, I fear, would be very clear to see."

"Oh, papa, papa! don't break my heart! You know—everyone can tell you—how steady Harry is!"

"That was my earnest belief, or I should never have agreed to your engagement. But Richard tells me there have been some strange stories about him of late—so strange that I have been asking Maylands, as we walked part of the way home together,



whether there was any mental weakness in the family. But Maylands declares there was never anything of the kind, and he is in a position to speak with confidence."

"But oh, we may all do wrong once, papa dearest; and if every one turns from us, how can we ever atone?"

"Heaven forbid I should deny any one a chance, little girl. Harry Curzon is young, and there is ample time to amend. But your future must not be risked. We will wait and see how matters stand before I can let things proceed further. Meanwhile I cannot let you see too much of each other."

"At least I may write?" I implored.

"I prefer you should not do so. I will see him on Tuesday evening at the barracks, when I am with Colonel Maylands, and will explain my reasons to him for insisting on at least a fortnight's probation. What?—does that seem too hard? A fortnight is not a lifetime, little girl—it is soon past."

But oh, that fortnight never came to its end, for Tuesday evening saw the shipwreck of all my future life.

My dear father came home from barracks looking ten years older; and when he told me that all was over, his voice broke so that in my agony I failed to understand, and it was long before I could clearly gather all that had taken place.

It seems that he and Colonel Maylands were sitting in the ante-room after mess, and talking it all over. Colonel Maylands had just told my father of his severe reprimand to Harry for the affair on Sunday, and how Harry had seemed overwhelmed with shame and bewilderment, but had annoyed him by obstinately declaring that he had not touched a drop of anything stronger than coffee that morning, when they heard a noise of furious voices from the mess-room, and throwing open the door they found Harry engaged in a violent quarrel with Mr. Vyvian. It seems they had been sitting smoking, when Mr. Vyvian, who is only a boy, and hadn't heard of Harry's and my engagement, began remarking on my Cousin Dick's foolish behaviour about me, which all the world could see. Harry grew very angry, and told Mr. Vyvian to hold his tongue, and Mr. Vyvian laughed, and very foolishly and impertinently said something about my preference for Dick, and the probability of my marrying him. Harry with a dreadful exclamation caught him by the throat, and just as my father opened the door he had seized a knife from the mess-table and would have stabbed Mr. Vyvian with it, had not Colonel Maylands just grasped his arm in time.

My poor, poor Harry! he seemed utterly stunned and bewildered, and stood staring at them, flushed and horrified at

what he had been about to do,—for Mr. Vyvian and he were firm friends, and Harry could not have hurt a fly when he was sober,—and yet he had hardly touched a glass of Sauterne at dinner that night.

Ah, it could not be passed over! I knew it, I knew it! Even Colonel Mayland's affection for Harry, and the desire of every one to spare a son of their old commanding officer, could not hush up a thing like this. Mr. Vyvian, terribly shocked at what had happened, most generously begged the Colonel to overlook it; but the mess-waiters had seen it, and it could not be hidden. All Colonel Maylands could do was to desire Harry to retire from the service, before any steps could be taken—my poor, poor Harry, who loved his profession so, and took such pride in it!

I think I was too heartbroken to resist. I let papa pack up all my little treasures—the ruby ring, the few short notes, the curly lock of raven hair; only I kept the glove he kissed that night we parted at the Rectory-gate, and a few withered flowers, and the dancing card of the Militia ball, where the “Henry Curzon” stood out boldly and firmly so many, many times.

They would not let me write a single line of farewell; and when a note came for me from Harry, blotted and scrawled—my poor, poor fellow!—mamma put it in the fire, and never told me. She did not mean to be cruel, I'm sure; but mothers never feel for their daughters quite as much as fathers do, somehow, it seems to me. That night, Dick, coming in, met Harry hanging about the gate, in the darkness and the rain, looking, as the groom told mamma's maid afterwards, “more like a ghost than hisself.” Oh, my poor boy! He demanded to see me, and that brute Dick ordered him off the grounds. Harry tried to push past him, and Dick, who thinks he's the strongest man in the county, dared to catch my poor boy by the collar. In an instant Harry had knocked him down, and had him by the throat. Dick screamed—the coward!—and the stablemen and gardeners ran out, and dragged Harry off. He just stood looking at them for a moment, in that same bewildered way, and then he turned and disappeared into the night. And I, sitting by the fire in my dressing-room, weeping bitter tears for him, and never knowing! Ah, how glad I was that Dick's coat was torn, and his face cut, and that he couldn't walk without limping for a week!

And save for the tears that fell on the newspaper paragraph, where “Lieutenant Henry Curzon resigns his commission in the 2nd Wiltshire Regiment,” I heard no word of my Harry for many a weary month to come.

Oh, that year that followed! how did I ever live it through?

I could not be so weak and wicked as to let life be spoilt because its happiness had gone; but oh, how utterly the taste had gone out of everything! I tried to be a good daughter, since I might never be a wife; but sometimes I looked at the little churchyard, and sighed to think how long it might be before I found rest and peace within its moss-grown walls. Somewhere during that winter Dick asked me to marry him. I was glad he did, for it gave me a chance of telling him how I despised him for all his conduct about Harry, and how I should love my boy, and him only, to the end of my days, even though we never met on earth again. Dick went away in a passion, and I was anything but sorry that he did.

It was in the last days of the next March that my dear father died. There was little suffering—a sort of gentle fading away, almost like a little child falling asleep. I think neither mamma nor I realised what was coming till the blow was just about to fall. I was sitting by his sofa one evening, his dear hand clasped in mine, when he opened his eyes all at once, and said:

“Forgive me, little girl, if ever I seemed hard to you. Tell Curzon I grieved sorely; give the boy my love, if ever you should meet him. Kiss me, Kathleen.”

And as I stooped to lay my lips on his, his gentle spirit passed away to the country which had always been its home.

When I began to recover from the shock of this grievous loss and blow, there began to be borne in upon me a new vague impulse. I had a great longing to find out Harry, and to give him my father's message. The desire was very strong upon me to see his face once more—to try if a hand held out to help might not even yet have power to save.

Colonel Maylands, when he came to my dear father's funeral, had given my mother some small news of him.

“He's gone to the dogs about as fast as any fellow I ever knew,” he said. “That tidy little fortune his father left him has all but gone, in a year—hardly a few hundreds left, I'm told. Heaven knows how or where he's spent it; I've seen his name in the police courts half-a-dozen times for street brawls, and reputable things of that sort. He's too decent-minded a fellow to go in for dissipations of the worst sort, but when he's not racing, he's card-playing. Extraordinary thing! when while he was in the regiment he hated cards—couldn't get him to take a hand at whist—and he hardly ever made a bet. I can only fancy there's some bad strain somewhere in the family, though I never knew of it; and it's come out all at once in him. Drink's done most of it, of course; they say he never looks sober; though how

a man can keep perpetually the worse for liquor for some nine months, and not suffer in his general health, I can't understand."

Where he was, or how he lived, no one seemed to know. I made up my mind I would go and try to find out. When I told my mother my decision, she was unutterably shocked.

"It's altogether impossible, Kathleen!" she said; "you must be mad to suggest it. If womanly feeling on your part doesn't prevent it, common sense ought to. Don't dream of such a thing."

But I persisted.

"You know there was nothing poor Harry would not do for me," I said. "I often think if I had seen more of him just when these dreadful things began, I might have kept him from them. No one has tried to help him all through—he shall see at least there is one hand held out to him if he will but try to turn back, even yet."

So, as my twenty-first birthday fell in May, and I came into possession of all the considerable fortune my dear father had left me, there was really no possibility of thwarting me, and my mother had reluctantly to give way.

For a little while it seemed as if my efforts would all be in vain. I could hear nothing of Harry's whereabouts. At last I had word of his having been seen at a race-meeting in a certain town of Essex; and, having friends in the immediate neighbourhood, I determined at once to go down there.

I reached Marnay Court late on a Saturday evening—so late that I did not get up in time for church the next morning, but slept off my fatigue, and spent a lazy, quiet day among the roses in the garden. My host and hostess were old people, and unused to church-going twice a day; so I started off to evening service by myself, and chose a distant church I remembered from a former visit—a quaint place of great age, far in the heart of the country. I was early when I arrived, having started betimes, so I skirted the low churchyard wall, and made for a bench overlooking the distant country, with the long faint sea-line on the horizon. As I approached the bench, a man rose hastily from it, and stood before me—and in an instant I knew that it was Harry.

Harry!—but oh, how changed! From the shabby and careless dress, to the look of wild despair on his still handsome face, there was not one thing to remind me of my boy-lover—my Harry of the happy Rectory days.

"Kitty! oh, Kitty!"—and the next minute he was on the ground at my feet, passionately kissing the hem of my dress.



My heart was sick within me as I raised him from that attitude of profound humiliation, and made him sit beside me on the little wooden bench. The change in him was still more apparent close at hand. The old light in his eye was quenched, and instead of the bright confident bearing of past days, there was the hopeless dogged look of him who has ceased to struggle with fate, and has owned it master.

"Oh, Kitty, Kitty!"—his very voice was altered, so deep, and wild, and hoarse—"why did you ever leave me? If you had not cast me off I should never have come to this. As long as you were with me I had the strength to fight against myself. I could hold out while you were by. Lay your little fingers on mine, as you used to do—don't shrink from me, for Heaven's sake, or it will kill me. I swear to you, Kathleen, that I've injured no living soul but myself; though Heaven knows how near to it I've been sometimes. Yes, it's true," as I looked at him. "Since the day you kissed me last, Kitty, I've done no single thing to make me unworthy—degraded though I am—to hold your hand to-day."

"Harry, can this be true?" I asked, as I yielded my hand to his poor feeble trembling clasp. "Don't you call intemperance an unworthy thing?"

"Kitty, believe me,—even my worst enemy has never put lying among the list of my sins,—I say to you solemnly that I have never once been drunk in all my life. Yes, you look shocked, but I tell you the truth. People say I'm seldom sober, I know; and there isn't a doubt I've done things, time after time, that I haven't had the least consciousness of—but it's never been under the influence of liquor. Why, look at me! Are my eyes bloodshot?—do I look like a man who has been drinking hard for a year? You could tell from my breath in a minute—why, I haven't had even a glass of beer in a week."

It was perfectly true, I could see. "But what, then—why——?" I stammered.

"No, I'm not insane,—I thought that, too,—but I've been to the best men on the brain and nerves, and they all insist I'm as sound as a bell, in my mind. Heaven knows what strange and awful disease it is. I've never been free, this whole year, from this dull pain and weight in my head—this black depression and these awful fits of reckless despair. Sometimes I find myself, to my horror, on the verge of some act that appals me with dismay: and heartily as I dislike cards, I can't see one without a mad desire to play. I've found out I had a gambling ancestor, somewhere about Charles the Second's time—I sometimes fancy I've



inherited his passion, and that it broke out all of a sudden last summer at Dewsbury. Whatever wrongs he ever did have been revenged in his descendant. I'm broken in health, and ruined in pocket: the last few hundreds I owned went at the races last week. The last ten-pound note I have in the world is in my pocket at this moment; and just before you came up I was wondering whether I had strength to get over to yonder line of sea, and end it all there. It's not a bad end that—soon over; and there must be peace somewhere down below those restless, ever-tossing waves."

The tears were dropping on my lap.

"Oh, Harry, Harry, don't talk like that!" I cried. "It is never too late to try—to battle back to life. Resolve to begin anew—to shake off this dull despair, and overcome yourself. Hope, and happiness, and honour may yet lie before you in the future."

"I can't," he said, shaking his head despairingly. "I haven't the heart nor the strength. Even your father will tell you the time is too late."

"My father has gone where there's no such word," I said, simply. "He asked for your forgiveness, Harry, before he died, and sent you his love."

Harry's face softened.

"He was the best man I ever knew," he said. "I'm very sorry he's gone, Kitty; only I can't feel things as much as I used."

The little cracked bell in the tower ceased its melancholy note, and the sound of a harmonium stole out upon the evening air. I stood up.

"What, must you go, Kitty?—must you leave me so soon? Good-bye, then. I'm glad I saw you once again, before—before——"

"I'm not going to leave you at all, Harry. Come into church with me now, and afterwards I am going to take you home with me to the Harcourts."

"Church? I couldn't!"

He shrank back.

"What should I do in church? I haven't been inside one since that time at Dewsbury."

"That's all the more reason you should come now," I said, slipping my hand through his arm to keep him; and, somewhat to my surprise, he yielded.

It was a quaint little building, with a low gallery at one end, and rows of rough heavy black oak benches. The Norman chancel had long ago disappeared, and the little square Norman

tower in the centre of the church did duty in its stead. There was a very small congregation,—a handful of villagers in their best black bonnets, with a sprinkling of hobnails and smock frocks. The school-mistress played the harmonium; and the service was conducted by a short-sighted young clergyman in spectacles. I was glad, for Harry's sake, that there was no more distinguished gathering.

He had selected a seat in a dark corner, nearly hidden from sight by a projecting pillar, and I got as near to him as possible. Once or twice during the simple service I felt him start violently, and half rise from his seat; but I laid my hand on his knee, and he instantly grew quiet again. After that I kept it there. It gave me great hope and encouragement to find how strong my influence upon him seemed to be.

The sermon was like the service—simple and homely; but the short-sighted rector had a kind and gentle manner, and it comforted me, somehow. Harry was wonderfully quiet while it lasted, and the few last words were so earnest and trusting that they brought the lately-dried tears to my eyes once more.

As we stood up for the last hymn I saw the old sexton hobbling forward to get the offertory plate, and Harry feeling in his pockets. I remembered the ten-pound note, and groped for my own purse, but found I had come without it. Harry seemed to have no small change about him, for after a moment of hesitation, he began trying to detach the lucky sixpence from his watch-chain. His poor trembling fingers could not manage it for a minute, and in response to my mute gesture he took the chain from its button-hole, and held it out for me to do. The old sexton was approaching so quickly that I was a little flurried, and the moisture still in my eyes made them a little dim; and it was only as I gave the watch-chain back to Harry that I discovered I had taken off the wrong bit of money in my haste, and dropped the old Dewcaster Roman coin into the plate, instead of the last year's sixpence.

I felt very vexed at my carelessness, for I knew how Harry valued the little coin, and it had touched me greatly to see him still cherishing it; and I watched the clergyman as he bore the plate towards the altar, wondering if I should stay after service and ask for it back, or whether a note the next morning would do as well.

I saw the rector reach the altar, and bend forward to lay the plate upon it.

Suddenly the whole church was lit up with a vivid flash of light, which showed lurid and clear against wall, and pillar, and oaken pew,—and a clap of thunder so violent that it rocked the

church to its foundations, and seemed to fill earth and air and sky.

One instant of half-unrealizing terror, and all was still again,—only a cry from the frightened school-children in the gallery, and the rector raising himself from the chancel floor where the violence of the shock had hurled him,—and the silver offertory plate and its contents—a mere molten mass of shapeless metal—lying in the further corner of the sacred enclosure.

“I am not hurt, my friends,” said the rector, the first to recover his self-possession—“only somewhat shaken by the force of the electric current. Let us offer our thanksgivings for this merciful preservation of us all.”

When we rose again, after the few words of closing benediction, Harry was still kneeling, his head leaning upon the book-rest of the pew, and his face hidden. He knelt there so long that I felt a little anxious, my nerves being a good deal unstrung by the events of the evening; but just as the last clatter of village shoes ceased to echo back from the stone porch outside, he stood up, and strode out of the little narrow pew. His step was so firm and so steady that I glanced up at him in wonder, and was struck by the sudden change in his expression. He was deathly pale, but his eyes were shining with a new light, and there was in all his bearing a calm confidence, a resolute serenity which filled me with a trembling joy.

I paused a minute at the gate to speak to the old sexton, who seemed terribly overcome by the late adventure.

“No, Mr. Coates ain’t no way the worse, savin’ for pins and needles all over his arms and legs, and a headache, and sich. But that there plate’s ruined,—clean ruined,—just a clear lump o’ metal,—coppers and silver and the bit o’ gold Mr. Coates put in hisself,—can’t tell one o’ them from t’other, all one lump, and so hot still, as you can’t tetch him with a ten-foot pole. What with that gret crack in the tower-wall, and the hole in the chancel tiles, there’ll be a pretty penny to settle; and the lightnin’ rod, as Mr. Coates says must be put up immediate,—‘lockin’ the stable door after the horse,’ says I; as we never needed no lightnin’ rods before, and I here, man and boy, goin’ on for seventy year. Well, well, times is changed—what with the earthquake last spring at Biddeswell, and this here lightnin’ stroke to-day; for never before in all my days did I see a bolt fall from a sky wi’out a cloud in’t.”

I looked up, surprised. Sure enough, the wide sunset light glowed upon an unbroken sea of blue, wherein one or two faint tender stars were just beginning to shine.



I turned mechanically towards the little wooden bench under the churchyard wall.

"No, not there," said Harry, speaking clear and low;—there was such a touch of his old masterfulness in his voice, that my heart leapt up to meet it. "I'll walk home with you, darling. I want to talk," and he passed his hand under my arm as we turned.

"Darling!"—it was twelve long weary months since I had heard that sweet name from his lips, and the sound blotted out all the suffering that had ever gone before.

"Something has happened to me—I can't tell what. I feel a new man since I've met you to-night. That awful pain has gone from my head all at once—and the weight and the horror. Something seemed to give way when that thunder-clap came,—I thought it was death, and was glad to die beside you, till I found it was only life coming back. It's so strange,—that thunderstorm on the moor was the beginning of it all,—and this has ended it. Never mind, it doesn't matter how or why it's happened; it's enough that I am rid of that agony, and my own man once more. Darling! I've been thinking of what you said, just now—you're right, I feel; it's never too late to begin again. I've made up my mind what I'll do. They want troops for this Soudan business. I saw it posted up in Colchester last week. I'm going to enlist to-morrow for the East. What?—No, darling; no, Kits—no sitting down at ease for me while the past is unretrieved. I must win back name, and honour, and fortune. I must live down all that's gone before. And then, Kitty—then, darling, may I put back the little ruby ring into its place once more?"

"Put it back now, Harry," I whispered, laying my cheek against the hand that held mine, in oh, how firm a clasp! "I've never been anything but yours, and I never could be; so, though I'll wait for you while you fight your battle, were it twenty years, I might as well wear the sign on my finger that I belong to you alone."

Well, well; there isn't so very much left to tell, after all. Harry took the Queen's shilling the next day, and when I parted from him on my way home to mamma, he was in the uniform of a private soldier. I wouldn't let him put that shilling on his watch-chain, in the place of the Roman coin, as he wanted to do, so he had it made into a brooch for me, and I wear it as my proudest ornament to this day.

I fear my poor fellow had a hard time of it, rather—it's always rather a rough road through the ranks for a gentleman; but he got on splendidly, and his constant letters were always brave and

cheerful. It was a dreadful trial when he went off to Egypt—he was just corporal then, and I felt it a terrible hardship that his kit wouldn't allow of his taking a hair-brush!—but all that time of hopeful waiting was as nothing when compared with that awful hopeless year before. He was colour-sergeant before the battle of El Teb, and was promoted on the battle-field to lieutenant for his gallantry in saving his colonel's life, at the risk of his own—and he got the V.C. too, so that even mamma's opposition went down before such brilliant success; and when Harry exchanged into the 2nd Wiltshire, now in India, and wrote that he didn't think he possibly *could* wait till he had a chance of getting leave, there was no very special outcry at my instant declaration that I meant to start in the next P. and O. steamer.

Colonel and Mrs. Maylands came down to Bombay to meet me—it was so wonderfully kind, but it seemed as if they didn't know how to be good enough to Harry after all that had gone by. And when we got to Jubblepore, and I put my head out of the carriage window, and saw Harry's brown face in the station, all joy and eagerness to welcome me—it did seem as if all the dreadful past were but a vanished dream.

It seems more dreamlike even this evening, as I write in the broad verandah, with its shaded swinging lanterns, and the full calm moon outside. It is all so silent and so peaceful, like our own restful hearts,—one could not believe all we had borne and suffered, if they only saw us now. And "Kitten," says a sleepy voice from Harry's hammock, "darling, let me shove your chair a little bit further this way. The shadow hides you when you sit there—and you know I'm wretched when I can't see your face."

And of all the shadows we have passed through, and the darkness that is left behind, there is no trace left this evening but the deep grave look under the laughing lightness in my dear Harry's eyes, and the rent fissure in a little sea-coast church tower in Essex, where they still point to it in all the country round, and tell in awed voices of the thunderbolt that fell there, out of the cloudless summer sky, and melted the plate and the offertory in it, as they lay together upon the altar.

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